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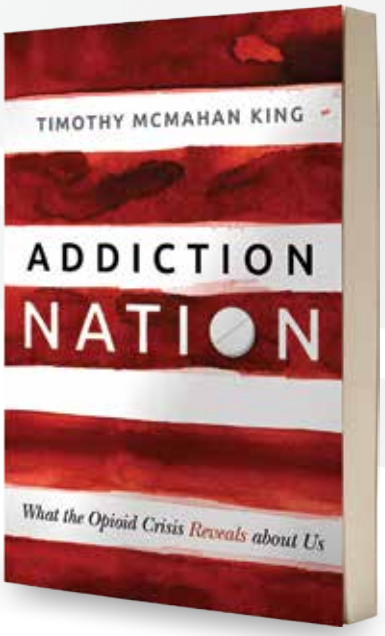

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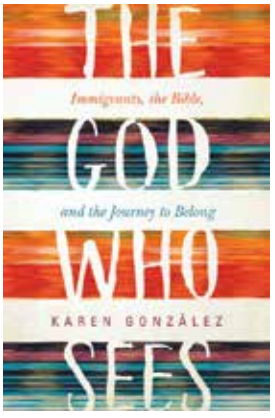

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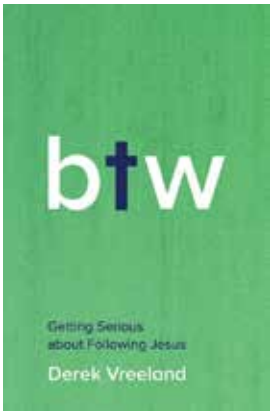

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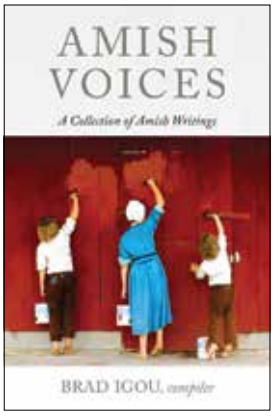

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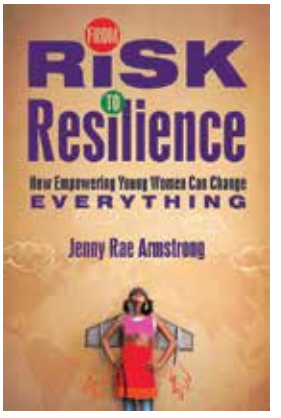

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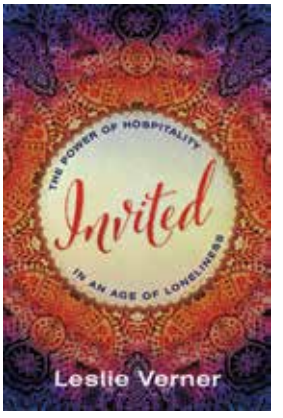

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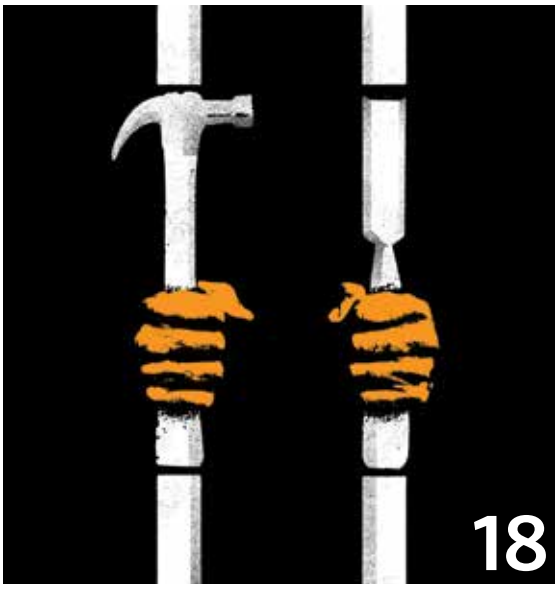

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IN 2015, Pope Francis told inmates at Philadelphia's Curran-Fromhold Correctional Facility that the purpose of prison is rehabilitation, "to give you a hand in getting back on the right road, to give you a hand to help you rejoin society." The pontiff said these words in front of a throne-like walnut chair made for him by prisoners participating in Philacor, a program that, according to news coverage about the pope's visit, offers job training in carpentry, catering, printing, and textiles to those behind bars.

Which is true. But as Will Young reports in "Who Built Your Pew?" prison industries such as Philacor ("one of the largest grossing jail industry programs in the nation," according to its website) are complicated.

While the programs can help reduce recidivism, the use of prison labor is rooted in the system of "convict leasing" developed after chattel slavery was abolished. Today, inmates working in state-operated prison industries earn an average of 87 cents an hour.

How do we measure the worth of a human life? Obviously, it's not a question we can answer through balance statements and spreadsheets. And yet, so often that's exactly how we operate, explains Princeton Seminary professor Keri Day in "Markets and Morality." Day peers into the logic behind systems such as prison industries—and immigration laws and environmental policies and international trade agreements—and finds there a calculation "based on crude pursuit of profit and a devaluation of the basic humanity" of the people involved, "an obvious violation of Christian principles."

When we're confronted with these ugly truths about "market morality," the temptation is to avoid thinking about money and economics altogether. But, as Rose Marie Berger explains in "Spiritual Reflections on My Paycheck," the real task is to think deeply about money, unlearning the ways we value wealth above people. "Remember," Berger writes, "wealth and assets, debts and wages are all topics for Christian discipleship." ■

Letters

Lifting the Shadowland of the Devil

After watching news about the New Zealand shootings, I read Jay Wamsted's article "How Racism Wins" (April 2019) and was struck by how the words of this high school teacher are in the spirit of Father Daniel Berrigan. Then I flipped the page to Rose Marie Berger's review of *The Five Quintets* by Micheal O'Siadhail ("Madame Jazz vs. Madame Guillotine"), lifting the shadowland of the devil for a moment with the work of an Irish poet. Thank you, *Sojourners*.

Kemmer Anderson
Chattanooga, Tennessee

Beyond a Buzzword

Diana Butler Bass ("Why I Don't Fear Schisms," March 2019) overlooks an essential point in her reading of American church history regarding schism. Simply put, regardless of ethnic, racial, socioeconomic, and gender diversity (something we once, not long ago, celebrated), the "church fights" that sell and divisions that multiply are fraught with disobedience to God and the gospel calling us to be one (John 17). The fractious church culture to which we've long become accustomed corrodes our witness to Christ, reduces churches to outsized institutional principalities seeking survival, and renders the mandate to love one another to a hollow, empty suggestion. Reconciliation is the latest buzzword commanding fine rhetoric and much spilling of ink, yet the ecclesial bodies bearing Christ's name cannot demonstrate how it is done. They have no authority to preach it to a world starving for it. Time's overdue for a truth and reconciliation commission for the churches combined.

The fractious church culture to which we've long become accustomed corrodes our witness to Christ.

Michael Tessman
Wakefield, Rhode Island

Dialogue and Deeper Truths

As an Episcopalian who fully supports the inclusion of LGBTQ persons, I found Diana Butler Bass' article "Why I Don't Fear Schisms" lacking. I do affirm and work for church unity, for it is in the active theological and faithful conversation that real decisions emerge. My more traditional friends and colleagues were not to be feared or scorned, but respected. In real dialogue, there is the seeking of the deeper truths, such as what is covenant and why it is the foundation of our actions regarding LGBTQ people. We need to avoid simplistic responses to serious theological matters. Maybe if we do, we can claim the ground we seem to have lost.

John L. Rabb
Baltimore, Maryland

Covenant Sexuality

I am disappointed in Nadia Bolz-Weber's February 2019 article "Honor Thy Sexual Pleasure?" It amazes me that *Sojourners* published an article on human sexuality that is silent on marriage, as if sexual activity has no relevance to marriage, or marriage has no relevance to sexual activity. While Nadia Bolz-Weber opens a thoughtful and needed discussion about the problems created by conservative Christian legalism surrounding human sexuality, I believe that her solution is inadequate. In addition to consent, mutuality, and concern, do we also need commitment? I would love to see a discussion of covenant sexuality.

Patricia Snyder
Tulsa, Oklahoma

"But what about ...?" *Write to letters@sojo.net or Letters, Sojourners, 408 C Street NE, Washington, DC 20002. Include your name, city, and state. Letters may be edited.*

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BY JIM WALLIS

We Interrupt This Family...

At right, students from Washington, D.C., join with local students at a baseball clinic in the Dominican Republic.

WITH THE COMING of spring and warm weather, my thoughts turned, as they always do, to the importance of the game of baseball in my family and the valuable lessons I've taken from it. We have a sign outside our home: "We interrupt this family for baseball season." It reflects how much baseball means to our whole family and how much time and space it takes up in our day-to-day lives for much of the year.

Some of my most rewarding years as a father were the 11 years (and 22 seasons) that I coached my sons, Luke and Jack, in Little League Baseball. Though that time is past, baseball still very much connects our family as my sons have moved through school, with my oldest continuing to play baseball at Haverford College.

Each spring my wife, Joy Carroll, organizes an extraordinary baseball service trip to the Dominican Republic for our sons' Wilson High School baseball team for its spring training. I go along to help and watch a wonderful week that many coaches, players, and parents have called "life-changing." This year, we took 25 teenage boys to the DR, a country that produces an amazing 20 percent of Major League Baseball players. Our trips are hosted by the Grey Sisters, a congregation of Catholic sisters founded in Canada and longtime allies of Sojourners, and Dominican baseball coaches. Our players serve and our baseball program supports ministries as varied as an orphanage for special-needs children, an elder-care facility, a program for Dominican girls going to school to become doctors in their own country, and, this spring, a project to help rebuild a Pentecostal church.

Isn't hope always indefensible in the end?

Perhaps my favorite moments are when we go out to a rural *bataye* (sugar workers village) to put on a baseball clinic for children and then play a game with an older team, when I can watch the deep connections our kids make with their kids. And to see, at the end of the week, when the Wilson and DR players say their goodbyes to each other.

The connection made between our players and the Dominican players is deep, as it is with the special-needs children and elderly residents. But our reflections at the end of the week also make clear that connections during a short visit are not enough, and our players are encouraged to see how their lives, their studies, their majors in college, and their careers and vocations can help them make long-term connections like these throughout their lives and leverage those connections for social justice. The players get that.

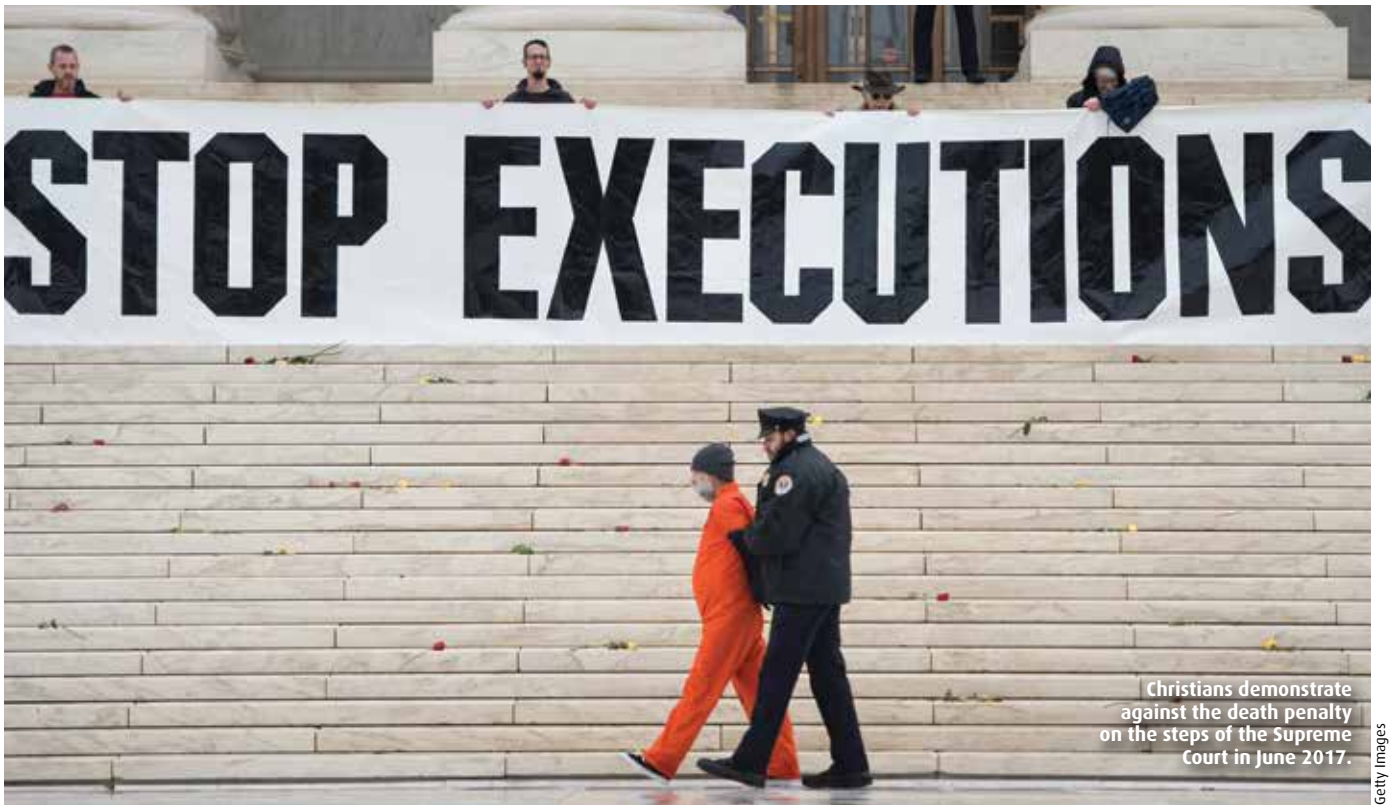
ONE OF THE most valuable lessons I've learned from baseball, as a father, coach, and fan, is what it can teach anyone who engages with it about hope, especially hope in the face of seemingly impossible odds. I have come to see baseball as a game of hope, because in baseball, failure is the name of the game. That is what makes it so much like life and faith—and so full of the intense expectations that lead us to hope. Think about it: Even the very best baseball players fail to get a hit two-thirds of the time—most players much more than that. Even when a player gets a hit, it is usually because of a pitcher's failure to keep the ball away from the sweet spots. Yes, failure is the name of the game of baseball, but hope against that failure is the energy of the game.

Author John Updike spoke of the "indefensible hope" of baseball: "There will always lurk, around a corner in a pocket of our knowledge of the odds, an indefensible hope." Isn't hope always indefensible in the end? Isn't it always a matter of faith—the faith that makes life possible, which is always so full of human failure? Life amid our current political and religious crisis is no game, but baseball has a lot to teach us about how to approach it—even and especially when the odds seem stacked against those God commands us to protect.

The basic lesson of baseball—the critical importance of perseverance and hope in the face of failure—is also one of the most important lessons we need for life in this world, and perhaps especially for this political era. Our relationships and solidarity with those who are vulnerable in our society means we cannot, morally, opt to give up because it's too difficult or because we so often encounter obstacles, setbacks, and failures. In that sense, we have no choice but to persevere, with or without hope. But how much better it is to persevere *with* hope.

Indeed, I believe that the greatest gift of the Christian faith—which baseball can also help remind us—is the knowledge that there is always hope, and we will not forever hope in vain. ■

***Jim Wallis** is editor-in-chief of* Sojourners *magazine.*



Christians demonstrate against the death penalty on the steps of the Supreme Court in June 2017.

Getty Images

By Kathleen Ryals

A Step against Death

The moral imperative behind the California moratorium on capital punishment.

ON MARCH 13, California Gov. Gavin Newsom signed an order issuing a moratorium on the state's death penalty—providing a reprieve from execution for 737 people on death row. Newsom cited as reasons that the ultimate penalty provides no public safety benefit and has no value as a deterrent. As someone who has worked as a public defender inside the criminal justice system for 30 years, I applaud the humanity and compassion of his decision.

While the number of countries that employ the death penalty dwindles, the United States and several others still enforce it. Despite strong empirical evidence to the contrary, we are led to believe capital punishment is reserved for the "worst of the worst" and that it is supported by victims and law enforcement alike. Leaving aside that 156 people on death row nationwide have been exonerated since 1973, the death penalty is discriminatory in its application and in the selection of those whom the state seeks to kill. It is largely sought because of the economic status of the defendant, the race of the victim and the defendant, and where the crime took place, not because of the circumstances of the offense.

When I am assigned a potential state execution case, I first meet—for as many hours as I can—with my client and any family he or she may have. I delve deeply into how we got to this moment. In addition to examining evidence, I want to learn how the person before me came to be here. How did this human, who was once an innocent child, come to be defined and judged by the worst moment in their life?

> Empathy is what Newsom has given those on death row.

I work closely with social workers, doctors, psychologists, and mitigation experts to develop a social history of the accused. People on death row are suffering. They are often mentally ill and have been emotionally and physically abused, and they are disproportionately people of color and with limited resources. They are children who have grown into adulthood without the benefit of education, compassion, health care, nutrition, and the chance to develop a spiritual life. They have suffered deprivation of the mind and body that often leads to illness, addiction, and sometimes violence.

I have represented clients who face the death penalty and seen death verdicts returned. I have seen people who consider themselves spiritual leave their moral compasses at home in pursuit of this penalty and seen those same people celebrate the return of a death verdict. Some politicians, who seek support from an electorate that they perceive wants state killing, do the same.

How do we reconcile the judgment of all faith traditions that premeditated killing is

morally and spiritually wrong with the support for this ultimate penalty? Whatever our faith, we all hold sacred the moral imperative to protect the least among us. Those on death row are such people.

Gov. Newsom, in following his moral compass and issuing a moratorium, paused the California execution process. If we believe that empathy is the interruption of the isolation of suffering, how can that be denied to any of us? Empathy is what Newsom has given those on death row—and an interruption in the dehumanization required in all of us to justify this penalty.

As death penalty lawyer and activist Bryan Stevenson so eloquently put it, "The death penalty is not about whether people deserve to die for the crimes they commit. The real question of capital punishment in this country is, *Do we deserve to kill?"* My hope is that we take this time to examine the very morality of this discriminatory punishment. ■

***Kathleen Ryals** is a public defender in Oakland, Calif.*

By Nikki Toyama-Szeto

An Open Letter to My Evangelical Brothers

How to stop undermining the leadership of women.

AS AN EVANGELICAL woman in leadership, I'm grateful for the good intentions of many white evangelical men in leadership. In the spaces where I move, many well-meaning folks are trying to be supportive of women, gender minorities, and people of color. They're trying to be generous with the privileges their gender or race may give them.

While I'm grateful for the heart behind these attempts at support, in many evangelical and other Protestant circles, these kind intentions often perpetuate the dynamics they mean to discard. A speaker, while introducing me, tried to help by saying, "What she's saying is really important, you should listen to her." Though it was a kind thought, he maintained his position of power by establishing himself as an authority over my content.

In contrast, the actions of another leader truly added credibility to my leadership—he reacted to my content with the comment, "That was really powerful. You've given me a lot to think about." His nonverbal communication showed that he was listening and learning. He modeled what it looks like to be under the leadership of a woman, and that was the greatest affirmation. He didn't need to tell people that he was *for* women or that it was important to learn from different perspectives. He showed us.

Some folks say all the right words, but their actions undermine them—relegating people such as me, an Asian-American woman, to forever stay in a lane that is outside the norm, dependent on borrowed credibility.

Christian men: Work with other Christian men to make space for women's voices, perspectives, and leadership. Ask other men what authors they're reading—are women on the list? Ask each other: In this age of #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements, what are we doing in our specific spaces to combat a culture of sexual assault? Be proactive. Ask the hard questions about sexual-assault reporting policies or child care arrangements. Too often, the burden of asking these difficult, sometimes awkward questions falls to people at the margins. Ask the hard questions yourself.

> Women don't want (or need) to depend on borrowed credibility.

Start with the people you know: Ask the women in your life one thing they wish men could understand about what it's like to be a woman (or a gender minority or a person of color). Ask them about the things that they wish were true. Try to understand the amazing perspective they bring.

But don't stop with the personal. What are the systems of privilege and power that create obstacles to the full participation and flourishing of women? What can you do to actively remove those obstacles?

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From the Archives

Fall 1971

I Was Hungry and You Blamed It On the Communists

I was hungry and
you blamed it on the communists
I was hungry and you
circled the moon
I was hungry and you
told me to wait
I was hungry and you
set up a commission
I was hungry and you said
"So were my ancestors"
I was hungry and you said
we don't hire over 35
I was hungry and you said
God helps those ...
I was hungry and you told me
I shouldn't be
I was hungry and you told me
machines do that work now
I was hungry and you
had napalm bills to pay
I was hungry and you said
the poor are always with us.
Lord,
when did we see you hungry?

—Matthew 25:37

This poem was published anonymously in the first issue of The Post-American, *forerunner to* Sojourners.

One pastor, from an established and historic church, made his convictions about the necessity of women's leadership into a requirement for where he would serve. When recruited by another church, his conviction required the denomination to revisit their policies before he could be hired. It was risky; a job offer was on the line. But I heard about his actions with gratitude, relief, and encouragement. I thought about the women who might rise up, and the fights they won't have to fight, because of this pastor's deep and unwavering commitment to women's leadership.

Yet it doesn't seem right to celebrate this one man when countless women are toiling invisible and unnoticed. Can you get close to the struggle of women as it's being lived out today? In the pew in front of you, or in the cubicle next door, a warrior is living out her calling in courage and strength. Can you find her? ■

__Nikki Toyama-Szeto__ is executive director of Evangelicals for Social Action at the Sider Center of Eastern University.

A woman uses a makeshift lantern to work at a restaurant during a blackout in Caracas, Venezuela.

Reuters

By Lisa Sullivan

Darkness in Venezuela

Despite blackouts and shortages, U.S. intervention is not the answer.

THE DAY A massive electrical blackout plunged Venezuela into darkness, my neighbor Juan Carlos was finally heading back to seventh grade.

It had been four months since he had entered a classroom. His teachers had been missing since November, their $8 a month salary not covering even the commute. Doing the math, I realized that my two hens earned more with their daily eggs.

Leaving his darkened school, Juan Carlos headed straight to the potato field. I watched from the porch as he dropped to his knees to *rastrojear*—rake the field with his hands to uncover spuds missed in the harvest. The field's owner turns a blind eye to kids searching for food this way.

Before long, Juan Carlos called me to the fence, depositing several large potatoes into my hands. Daily, food passes back and forth over this fence.

Darkness has been seeping over Venezuela not for five days, but for five years. In my 34 years in Venezuela, I have never witnessed such a plunge from light to darkness.

I live in the village of Palo Verde. My neighbors are among the millions whose lives were uplifted by Hugo Chávez's social programs, in his Bolivarian revolution of the 2000s. Back then, new homes sprang up around me, schools functioned day and night, Cuban doctors made home visits. My young neighbors graduated as doctors, lawyers, and agronomists.

Now, in these days of severe economic crisis, most don't make it past sixth grade. Food, health care, electricity, transportation—all missing. Many head for Colombia in search of these basics.

A burning desire for change is in the hearts of most Venezuelans today. When Juan Guaidó arose from the National Assembly to declare himself interim president, the mood was electric. My neighbors, and much of

Venezuela, embraced this fresh face and the promise it represented. Venezuelans took to the streets with the hope that peaceful change was possible.

But in January, when the United States stepped in, it became clear that behind this fresh face lurked a dark agenda. The attempt to force a few million dollars of U.S.-sponsored humanitarian aid into Venezuela made little sense, given the billions of dollars taken away through more than a decade of U.S.-led sanctions.

Threats by Donald Trump and Florida Sen. Marco Rubio of a U.S.-led military invasion make clear the objective. Oil, not the well-being of the Venezuelan people, is the U.S. goal.

ON SATURDAY DURING the blackout, Juan Carlos and others gathered for their weekly farming day at my home. The kids expressed greater concern for the lack of rainfall than for the lack of electricity. Our lives depend on the food we grow.

Rather than lament, they decided to dig a large pond to collect the rainwater soon to come. I watched as they threw themselves into the task—hearts, muscles, shovels, and pickaxes. They refused to stop until it was done.

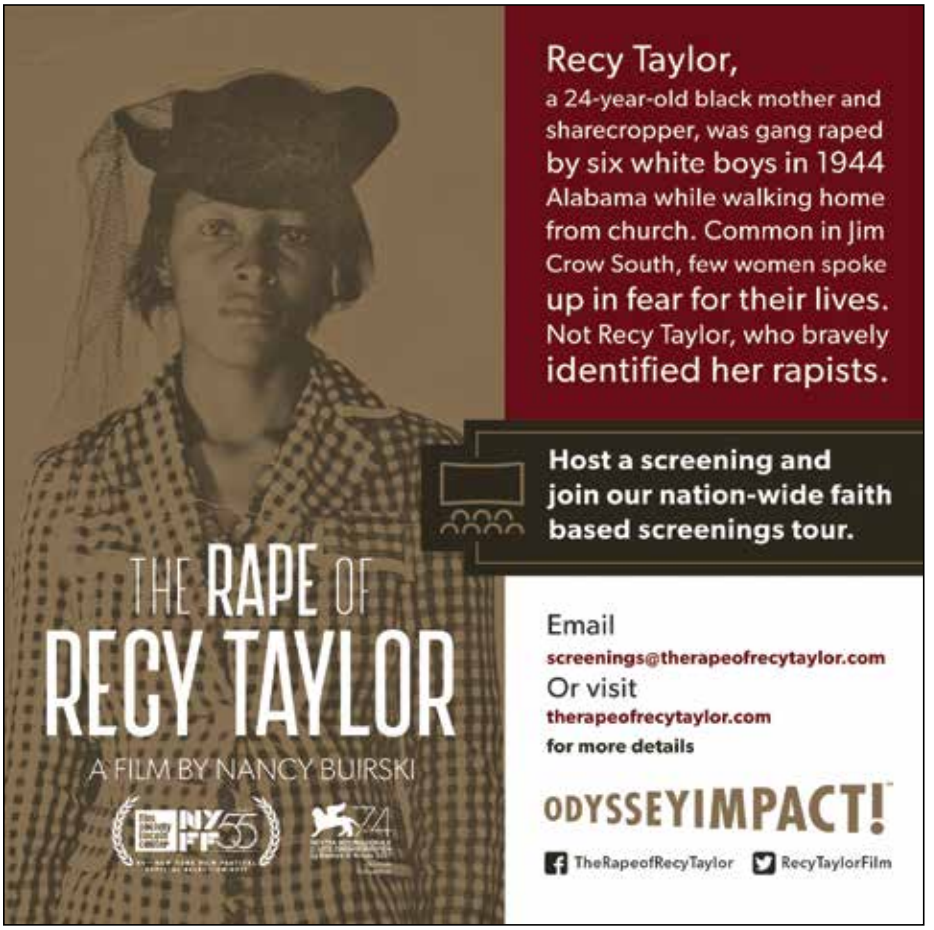
The untold story of Venezuela today is the tenacity and solidarity with which the Venezuelan people have faced this unprecedented crisis. Juan Carlos' potatoes, the rainwater catchment pond, and a million more examples: These are Venezuela's light. Perhaps it can only be seen from here, like the stars on a black, black night.

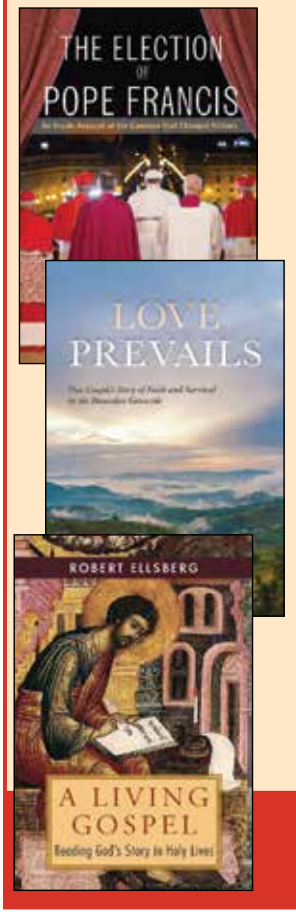
My plea as a U.S. citizen is to say no to all forms of U.S. intervention. My plea as a 34-year Venezuelan resident is to say no to this untenable status quo.

This long, dark night will not lift through more corruption, more mismanagement, or more militarization from within. Nor will it lift by force, by gun, or by sanctions from without.

We, the people who live in Venezuela, need to do the long, hard work of rebuilding the country. You can cheer us on—but do it from the sidelines, please. ■

Lisa Sullivan, *a former Maryknoll Lay Missioner, lives at Conuco Colibri farm in the region of Sanare, Venezuela.*





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VIDEO

Arlington (Va.) Presbyterian Church demolished its building in 2017 to prepare for a new, multiuse building.

Lloyd Wolf

Broken for You

Faced with declining attendance and an aging building, Arlington Presbyterian Church sold its property to make room for a multiuse building that will include a new space for worship, 173 units of affordable housing, and nonprofits such as La Cocina VA, a bilingual culinary training program. "This is the body of Christ, and we're going to share it with the neighborhood in south Arlington," Rev. Ashley Goff told Sojourners' Anna Sutterer. Watch more at **sojo.net/videos.**

QUOTED

"If white Christians don't take responsibility for unfertilizing the ground that breeds hate and violence, then we will not see change."

— Catherine Orsborn
on Islamophobia
sojo.net/orsborn

VIEWS

Author Linda Kay Klein

Beyond Purity Culture

When it comes to purity culture, "I think there's a growing cognizance that this didn't work," Linda Kay Klein, author of *Pure: Inside the Evangelical Movement That Shamed a Generation of Women and How I Broke Free,* recently told Sojourners' Sandi Villarreal.

"A swell of voices within—and for some, now outside—the church has come to similar conclusions about the effects of purity teachings that permeated 1990s-2000s white evangelical churches," writes Villarreal. "The context in each story varies, but the common theme identified is how a shame-based introduction to adolescence has left scars through adulthood."

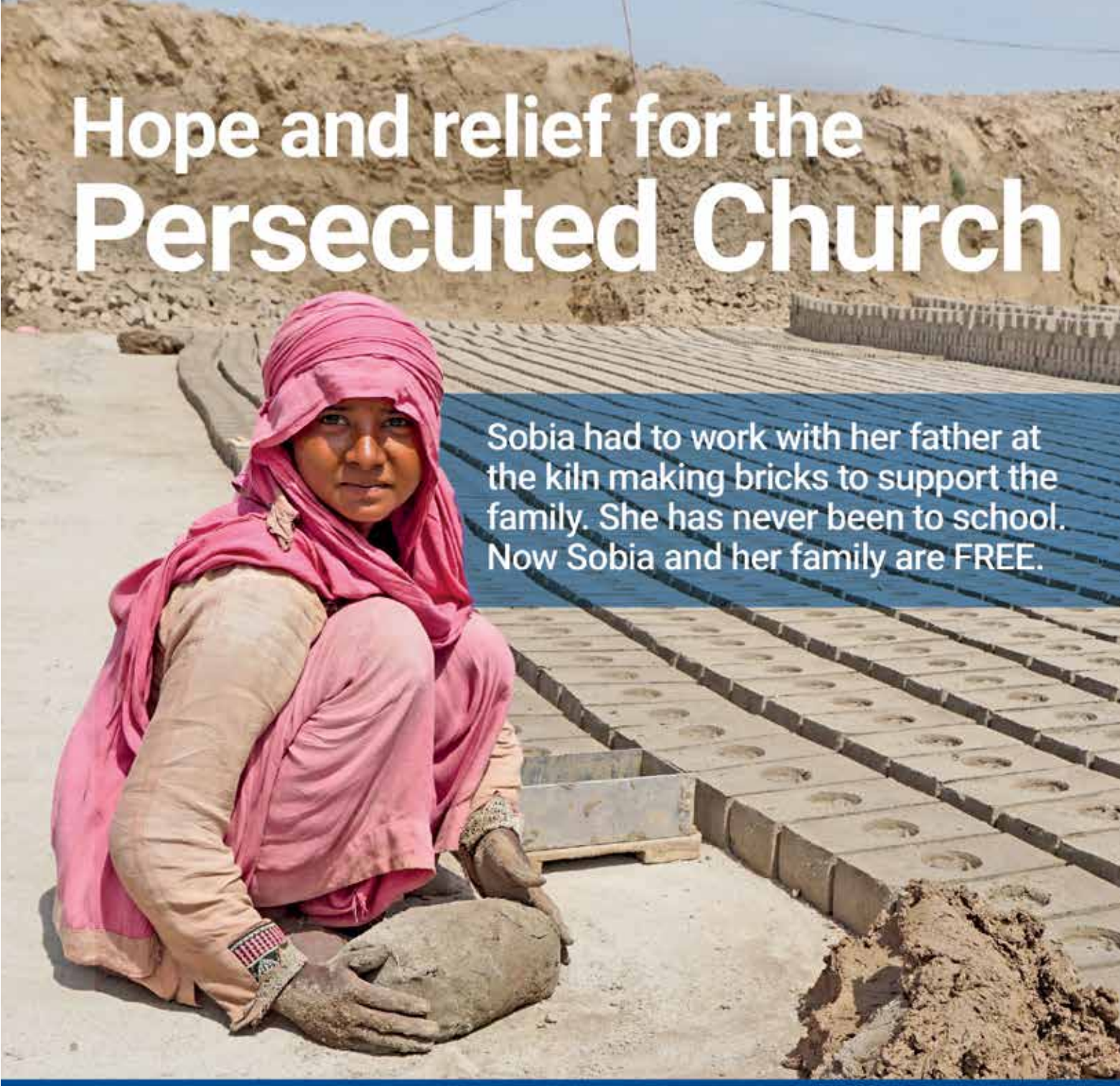
But, as Villarreal reports, "a handful of pastors, writers, and activists have been finding their way forward—through shared storytelling, interpreting a more inclusive biblical sexual ethic, and offering new models for the church to talk about sexuality in a holistic, faithful way."

Among them: a 40-year-old anthropologist who started the hashtag #noshamemov; the founders of spaces such as the Courage Conference, the Alliance of Baptists' Just Sex Conference, and Klein's Break Free Together initiative; Rev. Lacette Cross, founder of Will You Be Whole; and Nadia Bolz-Weber, author of *Shameless: A Sexual Reformation.*

"Once you destigmatize the conversation, and once you take away the shame of it, it's really not that hard to talk about," Cindy Wang Brandt, author of *Parenting Forward,* told Sojourners. "Sexuality is so much more than just the sex act. We bring so much of our whole being into our sexuality. It's physical, it's emotional, it's spiritual."

Read more at **sojo.net/villarreal.**

Hope and relief for the Persecuted Church



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BY EBOO PATEL

Van Jones

Reuters

Finding Common Cause

VAN JONES COULD easily have been the Luke Skywalker of the resistance. His CNN comments on the night of the 2016 election, characterizing Trump's victory as a "whitelash," went viral. And he wasn't exactly an unknown before that.

For many years he's been one of the most highly respected progressive activists in the country, building institutions and leading campaigns around racial equity, criminal justice reform, and a Green New Deal (yes, he was on it before Ocasio-Cortez).

> I've learned to prefer the concrete, imperfect improvement to the grand ideological gesture.

So it was fascinating for me to read about the partnership that Jones has forged with the Koch network on criminal justice reform.

Here is how Jones (who I know personally and regard as a friend) explained why he's working with the Koch network—the very people who tried to get Jones fired from his role in the Obama administration and whose conference Jones once protested. "There's a lot of stuff that we're going to keep fighting on in America," Jones said. "I have no problem with that! The problem is there's a lot of stuff we do agree on that we aren't working on together at all ... And if we start working on that, a lot of stuff is gonna get better."

The symbol of the moment for many of those in progressive circles is the fist in the air. But, as both an educator and an activist, I've learned to prefer the concrete, imperfect improvement to the grand ideological gesture. That's how I view the criminal justice bill that Van Jones and the Koch network worked on together, as something that does measurable good in the world rather than simply makes for a striking image on a poster.

Come to think of it, the manner in which it came together is not altogether without symbolic weight, and what the partnership communicates is something very different than the image of a fist in the air: a hand across the aisle.

I think the substance and the symbol is remarkably important. In a diverse democracy we can disagree on some fundamental things and still work together on other fundamental things.

Are there lines that I'm not willing to cross in the pursuit of that type of cooperation? Yes. I'm not writing checks to the KKK.

But funneling money to the KKK is obviously not a mistake progressives are making right now. Rather, our mistake would be assuming that anyone who disagrees with us on anything is hiding a hood in their closet.

The truth is that we are living at a time of great opportunity when it comes to building partnerships with intellectuals of diverse worldviews. Trump's racism has been so obvious and abhorrent that a huge number of center-right intellectuals have publicly distanced themselves from him and that worldview. Here is a partial list: George Will, Bill Kristol, David Brooks, Ross Douthat, David Frum, David French, Max Boot, Kathleen Parker, Megan McArdle, Pete Wehner, Russell Moore, and Arthur Brooks.

In my mind, this is a whole set of new partners with whom progressives can make common cause, in the manner of Van Jones and the Koch network. ■

Eboo Patel, *founder of the Interfaith Youth Core, writes about pluralism from his perspective as a Muslim American.*

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BY KATHY KHANG

Fires Closer to Home

JUST WEEKS before the fire, I was in front of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, walking around the exterior and enjoying the architecture and ornate sculptures depicting stories of the Christian faith. I didn't go inside, and I may never have the chance because of how long it will take to rebuild Notre Dame. The iconic wooden spire and roof are gone, as experts try to assess how to support the remaining structure and make it safe. There is international support and money to rebuild, because it appears a tragic accident has destroyed a place that is considered sacred even to those who consider themselves secular.

And that is why so many of us should keep going back to why the burning of three black churches in Louisiana didn't fill 24-hour news cycles or make us—me—stop and turn on the news.

The son of a deputy sheriff is being held without bond, accused of a hate crime in connection with the fires at St. Mary Baptist Church, Greater Union Baptist Church, and Mount Pleasant Baptist Church.

The charred remains of Greater Union Baptist Church in Opelousas, La.

William Widmer/*The New York Times*/Redux

> We have bought into the lie that certain kinds of religious art and history are worth telling, saving, restoring, and rebuilding.

The son of a law enforcement officer.

I know now why I didn't stop to turn on the news, why I didn't expect the same 24-hour coverage, and why, even here in the United States, where most people will never travel to Paris, our collective gaze is moved to the fire at Notre Dame.

White supremacy.

It has taught me, and us, that a building "over there" is more valuable and sacred than the black, immigrant, and refugee churches, communities, and people here. As one who has seen Notre Dame, I will say that the architecture is breathtaking, but as a church it isn't any more valuable, holy, sacred, or important—not if I as a Christian, we as followers of Jesus, actually believe what we say we believe. We are supposed to be one body, and when one part hurts we all hurt, but I confess I didn't hurt the same way with my black siblings as I did with my Parisian siblings.

I didn't see the burning of black churches as a collective loss because American values/white supremacy taught me that my individual desires to visit Europe mean more than developing an empathy that moves me to action in word and deed to grieve with my black siblings in Christ. The loss of those churches doesn't impact my future dreams and aspirations because I dream for another chance to visit Paris, not Louisiana.

I don't want to see the intentional hate, the action of white supremacy, because it is hard and ugly and it makes me angry and fearful. It requires me and each one of you to consider how we have bought into the lie that certain kinds of religious art and history are worth telling, saving, restoring, and rebuilding even as I live on land stolen from the Fox, Winnebago, Kickapoo, Mascoutins, Miamis, and Illinois and live as a woman who was told to bend her tongue to speak the white people's language while taking a name that would be easier for those same white people to pronounce.

This work of justice, of bringing God's kingdom come and will be done on earth as it is in heaven, is complicated, ugly, painful, and beautiful. I still want to revisit Paris. I want to reclaim my heart language and mother tongue. I want to continue to learn about the losses and the cost of white supremacy, particularly in the church, here in America. I know that learning will invite more pain, grief, and lament, but it also will invite imagination and hope. I hope some of you will keep moving your gaze to where Jesus is inviting us to look and see. It doesn't have to be so far away. ■

***Kathy Khang** is a writer, speaker, and coffee-drinker in the north suburbs of Chicago and author of* Raise Your Voice: Why We Stay Silent and How to Speak Up.

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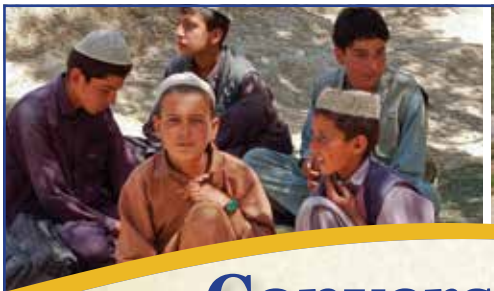

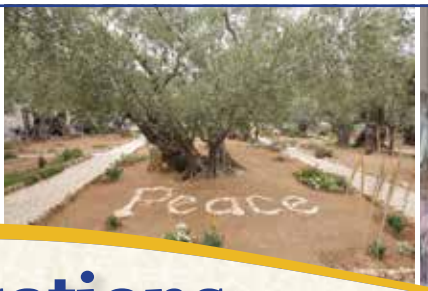

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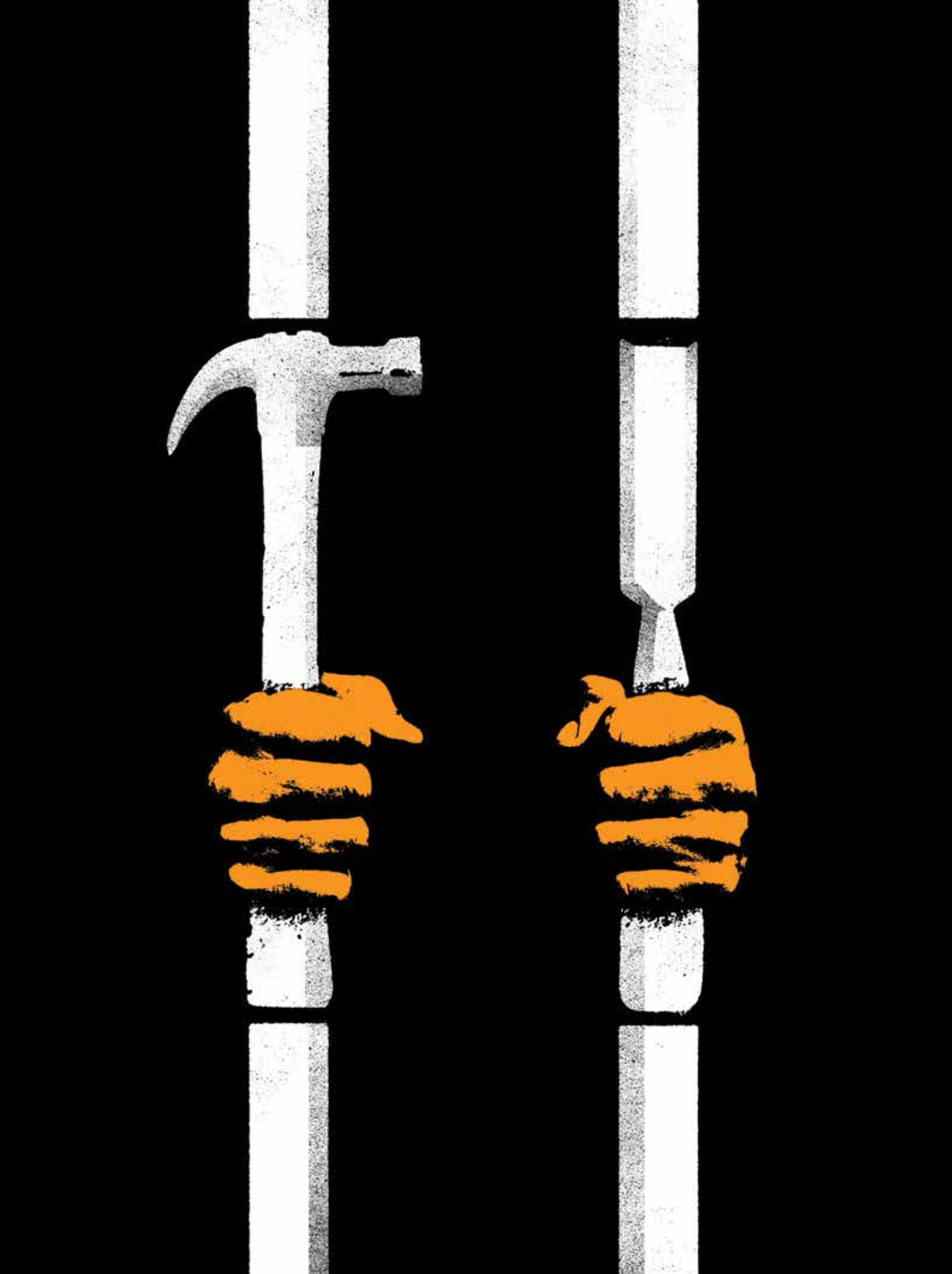

Who Built Your Pew?

In some Iowa churches, the Sunday offering supports the prison industrial complex.

by **WILL YOUNG**

STEVE KLAWONN, pastor of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Evansdale, Iowa, was near the end of a seven-year church redesign when he scoured the internet for new church furniture—with no promising leads.

"Needless to say, church furniture prices tend to be pretty high," he said.

In a climate where church attendance is declining and houses of worship are looking for creative ways to stay in operation, solid wood pulpits and lecterns are expensive investments. In nearby Humbolt, family-owned Gunder Church Furniture sells a winged pulpit for $1,546; a matching lectern goes for $1,078. Klawonn liked the idea of choosing an in-state manufacturer, but affordability was key.

Klawonn eventually landed on the website of another Iowa-based manufacturing facility that builds and refurbishes chancel furniture and pews—with prices 38 to 70 percent cheaper than the pulpits and lecterns sold at Gunder, prices more like those of used items found on eBay and Craigslist.

The warehouse Klawonn discovered—situated along the Mississippi River in Fort Madison—is *not* a normal for-profit American business. Rather,

Illustration by The Heads of State

it is one of nine industrial sites owned by Iowa Prison Industries (IPI), a state-managed enterprise of Iowa's Department of Corrections.

In addition to church furniture, the IPI factory makes furniture for Iowa state offices and public universities. Every worker at the plant, from the furniture designers to builders and technicians, is an inmate—incarcerated by the state of Iowa and part of an inexpensive labor force used to help pay for the prisons they're held in.

Low, low prices

Iowa Prison Industries is hardly a secret among Iowa churches. St. Paul's United Methodist Church in Cedar Rapids allocated $4.3 million to renovate its historic building. "It was a lot of money," acknowledged Lois Mather, chair of the renovation committee and St. Paul's lay leader. But St. Paul's spent only one-tenth of 1 percent of its fund to refurbish its furniture—a chest, side chairs, a table with two pull-out leaves, a sofa, several floor chairs, and a library table—by contracting the restoration work to IPI. Mather noted how well IPI restored the original look of the pieces, and now says she is shocked whenever St. Paul's or any other church in Iowa buys furniture from anywhere else.

"Hey, you're incarcerated and making good money, some of that is going to go back to defer the cost of your incarceration."—Dan Clark, Iowa Prison Industries director

The Iowa Department of Corrections takes 80 to 90 percent of the earnings of incarcerated men working for Iowa Prison Industries.

First Lutheran Church in Cedar Rapids is in talks with IPI about refurbishing its pews, as part of its own $4 million building project. Friendship Baptist Church once had office furniture manufactured by IPI. A handful of Iowa Catholic churches—St. Mary's in Storm Lake, St. Theresa's in Des Moines, St. John's in Norwalk—have contracted with Iowa Prison Industries in the past.

Every state has a prison industry (except Alaska, whose prison industry went bankrupt in 2010). Four states allow prison products and services to be sold only to state agencies—to prevent for-profit companies from gaining an unfair advantage by hiring low-wage prison labor and undercutting local businesses. Most states, 46 in all, sell their prison-manufactured products, such as furniture, clothing, and electronics, to nonprofits (including churches) as well as to state agencies. Iowa is the only state whose prisoners make pews and pulpits, specifically catering to churches. In fiscal year 2017, Iowa churches funneled as much as $245,000 to prison industries through the purchase of furniture and refurbishing services.

Churches are a faithful, if small, customer base for prison industries and create an often-overlooked mass incarceration revenue stream—from the offering plate to the prison industrial complex.

Follow the chain gang

Stanley Hart III, 52, made $1.24 an hour when he drafted blueprints for IPI. He designed furniture, some for churches, and was good at it. In a handwritten letter from prison, Hart responded to interview questions about his daily routine at Iowa Prison Industries. It consisted mainly, he wrote, of "bidding projects, reviewing project plans, and estimating materials."

When IPI upgraded operations at its plant in Anamosa, Iowa, Hart helped design the new shop buildings. (His résumé includes an MBA and a master's in theology from Shalom Bible College in West Des Moines.) In the process, Hart earned the trust of his superiors, including IPI director Dan Clark.

Hart's hourly wage placed him in the 54th percentile among incarcerated earners. The average wage among state-operated prison industries nationwide is 87 cents an hour—with starting wages around 30 cents an hour, before raises or bonuses. Earnings of more than $3 an hour are in the top 10 percent of incarcerated earners nationwide.

Low wages are at the root of the prison industrial complex, a phrase used to describe the overlapping economic interests of government and industry. Prison industries historically are rooted in the U.S. chattel slave system. The dismantling of that system after the Civil War left private industry

without free labor. A system of "convict leasing" was introduced to keep manual labor cheap. Now it is used to keep profits high and taxes low. IPI says it was founded to "employ offenders to support the cost of running the prisons."

That cost is high and rising. U.S. state prisons, collectively, spend $50 billion per year to stay in operation. The United States makes up less than 5 percent of the world's population but holds nearly 25 percent of the prisoners in the world. Over the past few decades, the prison population in the U.S. has increased more than 400 percent, according to the Congressional Research Service.

Where does the money go?

There are two types of prison workers in Iowa: those who work in traditional ("state-managed") industries—including church furniture manufacturing—and those who are leased to private corporations ("private industry enterprises"). According to IPI director Clark and IPI annual reports, the wages of IPI's state-managed prison laborers are allocated to Iowa Prison Industries, the Iowa Department of Corrections, and the state general fund. In theory, a prisoner working in a prison-run industry in Iowa makes the state minimum wage of $7.25 an hour. In practice, the Department of Corrections takes 80 to 90 percent of the earnings, including funds to pay off court debts and victim restitution. Hart, for example, entered prison at age 18 with a debt of $150,000 from fines and surcharges placed on him during his arrest (part of Iowa's "pay for stay" program).

The numbers are not always easy to track. However, in fiscal year 2017, $1.7 million from the wages of IPI's private-industry workers went to the state, almost 21 percent of which was taxes on prisoner wages. The profits that IPI makes from its sales, according to Clark, are used to support educational and vocational training for prison workers. But those profits are very small—about $80,000 in fiscal year 2017—far short of the amount needed to pay for such programs.

Clark acknowledges that prisons are expensive, but—like many correction industry executives, as well as many local church leaders—he feels it is the responsibility of prisoners to pick up the tab. "Hey, you're incarcerated and making good money," he said, "but some of that is going to go back to defer the cost of your incarceration."

This philosophy—one that shifts the burden of costs to inmates—has been used in the past to justify IPI's expansion and was embraced by Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in its decision to contract with IPI. The availability of state-managed cheap labor allows prison industries to undercut the prices of smaller manufacturers, including those that manufacture church furniture. Thus the savings that churches enjoy are part of a system that transfers wealth from the private sector to the state.

Incarcerated women need to work the equivalent of 9.2 hours to pay for the cheapest box of tampons.

Track recidivism rates

At St. Paul's in Cedar Rapids, the renovation committee was familiar with low inmate wages. "Prison pay is a concern I have, but then there's the flipside of that," Mather said. "Just put yourself in that place. You made a huge mistake, but wouldn't it be nice to train for a job and see something positive changing for yourself?"

Prison industry executives don't portray themselves as cash cows for the state, but as humanitarian organizations. Their mission, they say, is to reduce recidivism and bolster successful inmate re-entry.

Clark links IPI's mission to that of the church: "People of faith and people in correctional industries have a lot in common," he said. "We recognize that up front."

In 2017, during IPI's annual training conference, 36 empty chairs were placed on the left side of the room. The chairs were meant to symbolize IPI's progress on reducing recidivism. A study found that IPI's labor program had reduced recidivism by 8

Leaders of St. Paul's UMC said it was "a pretty easy decision" to hire Iowa Prison Industries to restore their church furniture.

percent that year, which worked out to about 36 offenders not returning to prison. Clark sees this as IPI's crowning achievement. "[Employers] are looking for someone they can train and who will show up to work," he said. "So, no matter what else—whether it's [making] license plates or sewing or welding or making pews—that simple act of working is what we hear is most important."

Nationwide, however, unemployment rates among former inmates are sobering—"higher than the total U.S. unemployment rate during any historical period, including the Great Depression," according to a 2018 report by the Prison Policy Initiative. The national unemployment rate in 2018 was 4 percent; for formerly incarcerated people it was 27 percent. "Although employers express willingness to hire people with criminal records," the PPI report continued, "evidence shows that having a record reduces employer callback rates by 50 percent."

While IPI's program may have slowed the rate, overall Iowa's recidivism is going up. Nearly 4 in 10 released Iowans return to state prisons within three years—and the rate has increased 7.3 percentage points since 2014.

Calculate the outcomes

While Lenny Singleton was incarcerated in Virginia, he worked as a warehouse clerk for 13 years at Virginia Correctional Enterprises (VCE). The height of production brought 12-hour shifts, six or seven days a week, sometimes around the clock. Singleton made $150 a month; he could have made as much as $300 a month if he were willing to work 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.

"Absolutely it's a form of slavery," Singleton said. "That's exactly what it is."

Prison industries reject that label. According to Clark and Hart, inmates can choose to work for prison industries or not and the ability to choose is crucial. Hart, who remains incarcerated, writes that he never considered his work at IPI as "slavery," describing his work as an opportunity to work alongside a community and pick up vocational skills he was interested in learning.

Singleton, on the other hand, didn't see his employment at VCE as a choice. The prisoners who typically work for prison industries, he said—at least the ones who stay—are the ones who *don't* have a choice: "That's why I was working, because I didn't have any money coming from the streets.

"All those guys who worked those kinds of hours worked because they had to take care of themselves," Singleton continued. And for them, he said, "that slavery became a blessing." Their work for prison industries, said Singleton, is the only way they could afford toothpaste and deodorant—sold from state-controlled canteens or the "company store."

"Absolutely it's a form of slavery," Singleton said. "That's exactly what it is."

In Iowa, prices at the prison canteen run about 38 percent higher than Walmart. But Walmart's not an option for prisoners. Incarcerated women working at IPI's textile shop in Mitchellville, Iowa, are paid 10 percent less than the men working at IPI's textile shop in Fort Dodge. Theoretically, these women would need to work the equivalent of 9.2 hours to pay for the cheapest box of tampons available.

Additionally, the racial disparity in Iowa incarceration ranks second worst in the country, according to The Sentencing Project. Black Iowans are incarcerated at a rate 11 times higher than white Iowans. Hart said, and Clark confirmed, that the racial makeup of IPI workplaces and warehouses is roughly equal to the overall prison population, making IPI a predominately black workforce.

Seek a faithful response

"Prison industries are problematic from the very beginning," said Willie Jennings, theologian and professor of Africana studies at Yale University. Jennings put the prison industrial complex alongside the "otherization"

and over-policing of black children, who are often labeled "disobedient" by state and institutional systems of power.

"It's no secret that many people fear young black and Hispanic children," Jennings said. "No secret that a white child who is disruptive is not imagined in the same way a black or brown child is."

For Dominique DuBois Gilliard, an Evangelical Covenant Church pastor and author of *Rethinking Incarceration*, IPI's disproportionately black workforce is as an example of churches benefiting financially from the "exploitation and dehumanization" of people of color. Gilliard quoted Matthew 25 and Hebrews 13: "Continue to remember those in prison." He sees a theological paradigm at play that presupposes that market forces are inherently good and that ignores the theological implications of racialized policing. "Seeking the maximum profit is not always the most faithful response," he said. And Jennings echoed: "We have not [brought forward] a theological vision of sentencing."

In 2017, Pastor Klawonn and Prince of Peace Lutheran successfully outfitted their sanctuary with an IPI-built altar, pulpit, lectern, baptismal tub, two flower vases, and two wooden chairs—delivered in time for the church's 60th anniversary. Klawonn calls IPI "an extension of [his] ministry."

When asked about inmate wages, Klawonn responded, "What they get paid is kind of their issue, because we can't demand that they get paid more."

He quickly added, "I mean, I guess we could and say we're not going to bring our business to them. But it goes beyond pay. It's really about how they use the talents they have in service of others." When asked again whether he thinks prisoners should be paid more, he responded with, "That's another issue for another time."

At St. Paul's United Methodist in Cedar Rapids, any concerns Mather had about prison pay were assuaged, for her, by her belief that the church's business gave prisoners "a pat on the back, to let them know they matter."

Choose a way forward

IPI director Clark has heard the "slavery" critique before. "It's interesting that some folks have that impression, because I can tell you, it's the opposite," he said. Clark also defended IPI against contributing to mass incarceration and disassociated his involvement with aggressive policing of nonviolent crimes or stockpiling prisoners to maximize profit. "We're not in the business of getting people off the streets so they can work for [us for] cheap," Clark said.

Even Mather, who wishes prison workers were paid more, says Iowa churches value prison industries' vocational training more than they are concerned with the social inequities that prison industries may reinforce.

Iowa churches value prison industries' vocational training more than they are concerned with the social inequities that prison industries may reinforce.

St. Paul's renovation committee voted in favor of contracting with Iowa Prison Industries based on two major factors, according to Mather: "price and justice." IPI's price was attractive, and there was a consensus, she said, that buying from prison industries promoted something good.

"It was a pretty easy decision," said Mather, pointing out that IPI sent upholstery samples to the church so the committee could review which fabric worked with which wood stains before St. Paul's paid for anything.

For Gilliard, the idea that upholstery samples or prices or quality of work might justify support for prison labor is morally reprehensible. It is evidence of what he described as a systemic failure of the church.

"It is when we become aware, and don't divest ourselves of these institutions, when we are preying upon the 'least of these,'" Gilliard said. "It is then we are complicit, and we too have blood on our hands." ■

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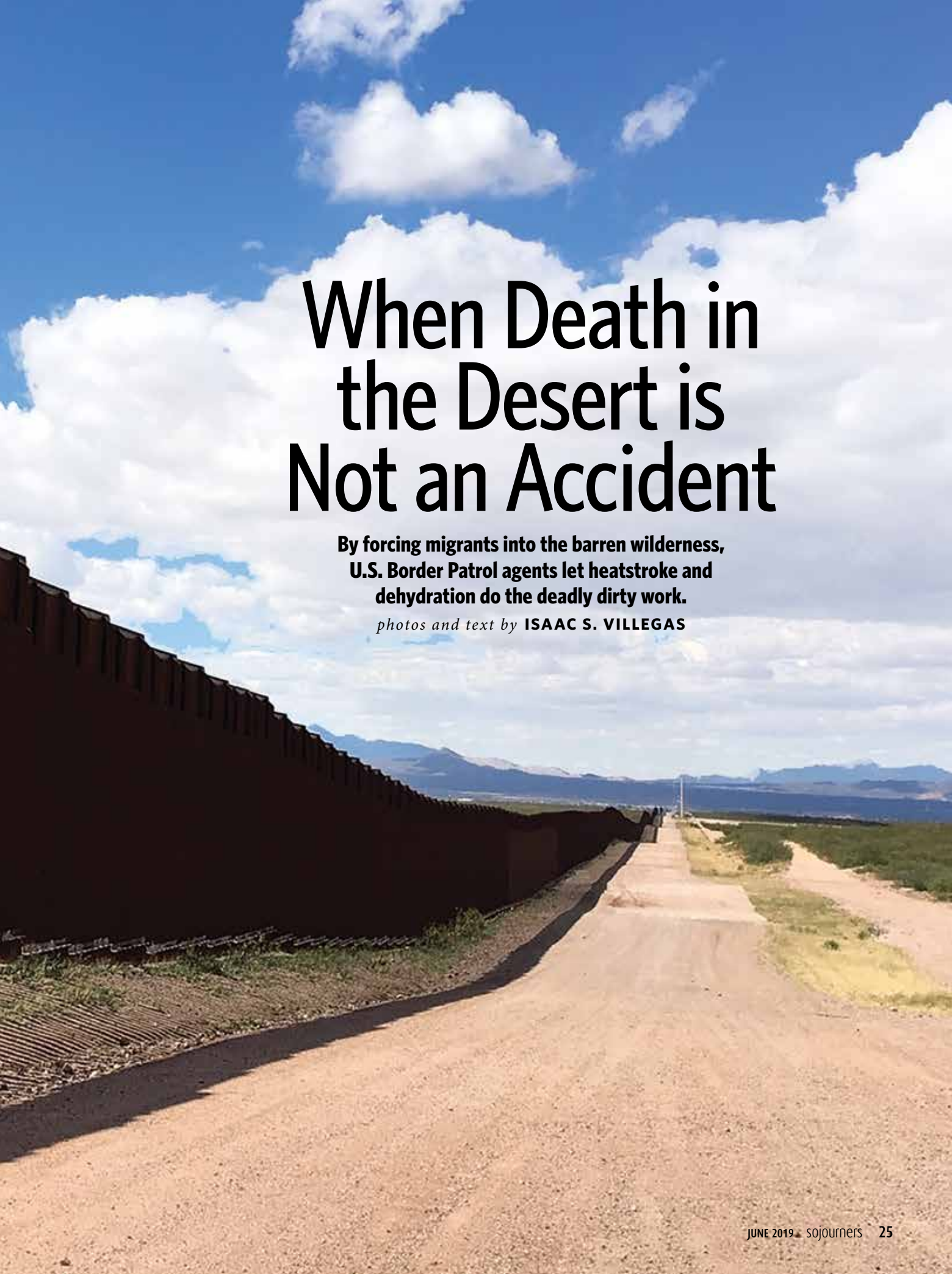
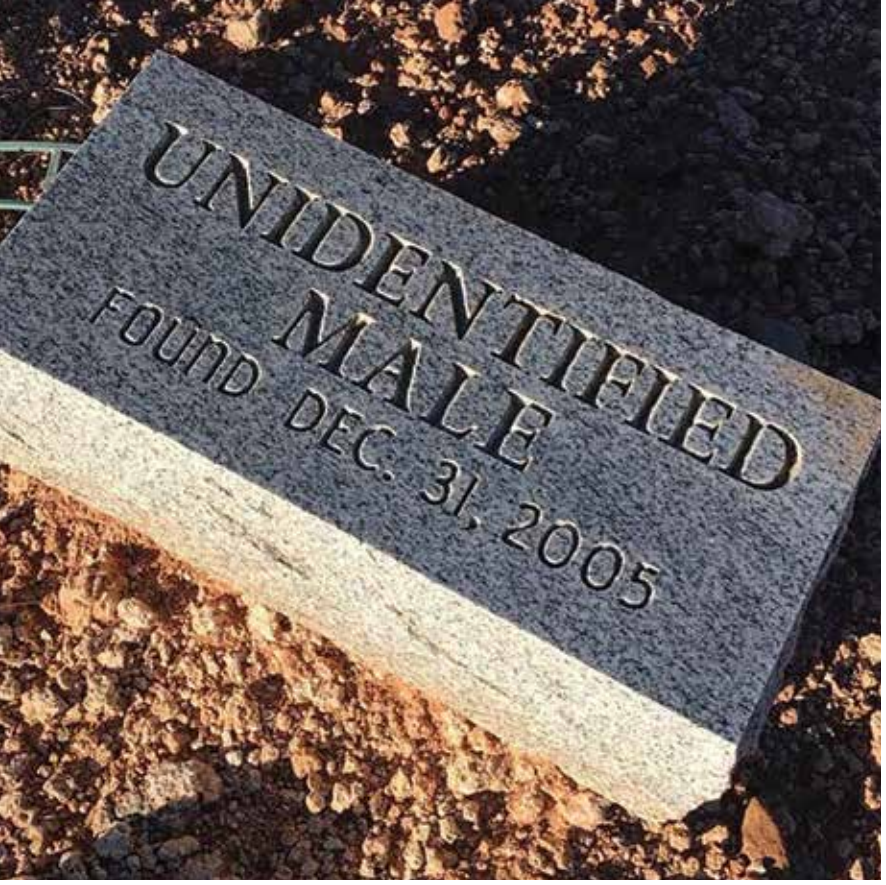


When Death in the Desert is Not an Accident

By forcing migrants into the barren wilderness, U.S. Border Patrol agents let heatstroke and dehydration do the deadly dirty work.

photos and text by **ISAAC S. VILLEGAS**



"And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand." **—GENESIS 4:11**

Above and right, gravestones in the Douglas, Ariz. municipal cemetery mark the remains of migrants found on the U.S. side of the border with Mexico.

IN DOUGLAS, ARIZ., in the shadow of the U.S.-Mexico border wall, a cemetery stretches across the desert. Between the orderly rows of gravestones, I notice clusters of cement blocks lodged in the sand with the same word etched into their flat surfaces: Unidentified. "Unidentified Female," "Unidentified Male," carved into the center of the tablet, along with a date: "Found Aug. 9, 2004." "Found Dec. 31, 2005." "Found Jan. 18, 2009." "Found Feb. 12, 2009."

A Mennonite activist whispers over my shoulder, explaining that the date marks when the remains were found in the borderland wilderness—a corpse in decomposition, a skeleton bleached in the sun, perhaps only a skull or a set of teeth.

A few of the older grave markers have "Unknown" instead of "Unidentified." Immigrant advocates petitioned for the change to "Unidentified" because while they do not know the story of the human remains found in the desert, they do know that each person had a family, every one of them was a parent's child, someone's friend. The gravestones remember people who are beloved, known and loved by friends and family now desperate for information, longing for an explanation, waiting for a phone call, searching official lists for the name of their loved one. Every unidentified life was known.

But their deaths were premeditated: The architects of the U.S. war against migration have built a deadly environment. According to its 1994 national strategy report, the U.S. Border Patrol outlined a plan to redirect migrants into the most dangerous regions of the borderlands: a "shift in flow," with the results that "illegal traffic will be deterred, or forced over more hostile terrain."

And they have succeeded. According to the Tucson-based organizations Coalición de Derechos Humanos and No More Deaths, in "the last two decades, the remains of at least 7,000 people have been recovered in the United States borderlands."

"The government chose to funnel people through the desert areas, and it created a killing field," Isabel Garcia, co-chair of Derechos Humanos, told the Sierra Club.

Blood cries out

In the early chapters of the book of Genesis, Cain kills his brother, Abel, and leaves him to rot in the wilderness, far beyond the gates of

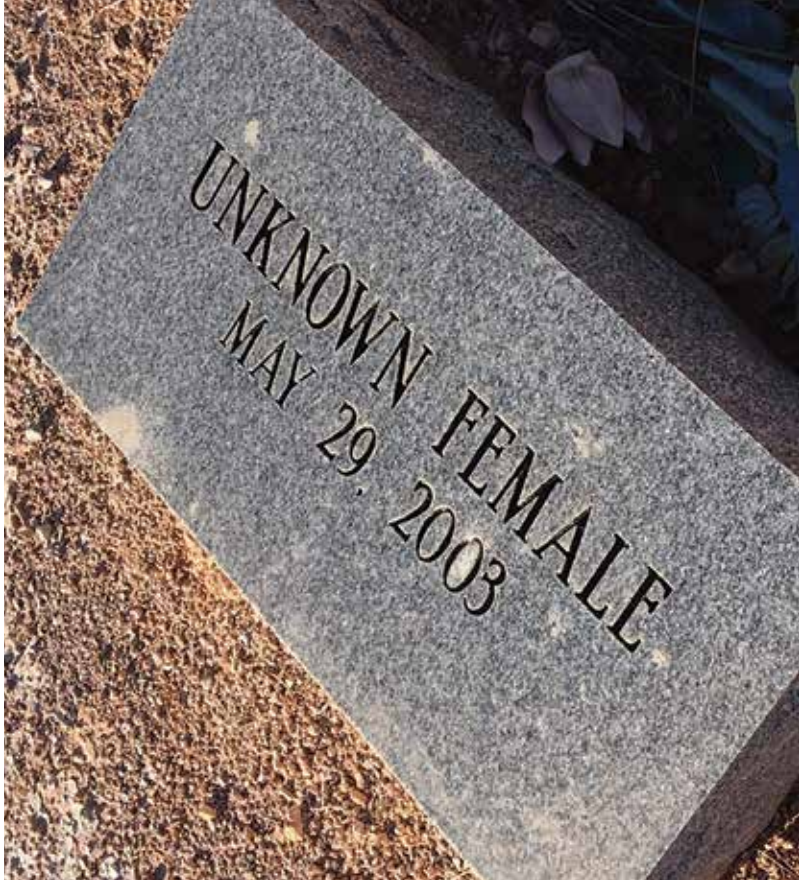
the garden of Eden. Cain returns to normal life as if his brother's disappearance will go unnoticed, as if the world will forget Abel. But God keeps vigil and confronts Cain. "Where is your brother?" God asks. "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" Cain responds, masking his culpability. "Listen," God says, "your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground" (Genesis 4:8-10).

This story haunts me as I walk through the borderlands, wondering about lost siblings, listening for their blood crying out from the sand—sisters and brothers, my people from beyond the border who didn't make it, my kindred from across the Americas who got killed before I could welcome them as neighbors. All the deaths here in the desert wilderness are like that first murder. Immigration policies and border enforcement strategies have deafened citizens to the blood. The U.S. is like Cain.

Through an interlocking system of fences and walls and surveillance outposts, the U.S. has made the terrain part of a lethal deterrence strategy—a border-enforcement plan calculated for the maximum number of deaths in a tactical war in the desert. Francisco Cantú, a former U.S. Border Patrol agent, outlined this sinister design. "Our policy of prevention through deterrence—pushing those crossing out from the heavily patrolled urban areas to the remote areas of the desert—serves to weaponize the landscape," he said in a 2018 interview with Vox. "That's why people are dying in the desert."

U.S. agents scavenge the borderlands, hunting for water outposts set up by humanitarian organizations. When they discover these oases—covered by mesquite and palo-verde trees, hidden among the creosote bushes—Border Patrol personnel gouge the canisters, emptying the water into the sand.

"It's true that we slash their bottles and drain their water into the dry earth," Cantú wrote in his recent book, *The Line Becomes a River: Dispatches from the Border,* "that we dump their backpacks and pile their food and clothes to be crushed and pissed on and stepped over, strewn across the desert and set ablaze." Derechos Humanos and No More Deaths found that, from 2012 to 2015, "at least 3,586 gallon jugs of water were destroyed in an approximately 800-square-mile desert corridor near Arivaca, Arizona."



"The government chose to funnel people through the desert areas, and it created a killing field."

Anonymous killers

A whole landscape of anonymous skeletons and mass graves, countless lives lost and untold horrors—the product of enforcement mechanisms that conceal personal responsibility for the onslaught in the borderlands. Indirect murder. Killing without pulling a trigger.

In *Migra! A History of the U.S. Border Patrol,* Kelly Lytle Hernández tracks how officials have included the environment's weaponization in their enforcement plans as a way

Enforcement mechanisms conceal personal responsibility for the onslaught in the borderlands. **Indirect murder.** Killing without pulling a trigger.

Above, crosses bearing the names of migrants found dead in the U.S. desert.

to absolve border agents from blame. In the 1950s, "immigration law-enforcement techniques shifted responsibility for the number of deaths associated with undocumented immigration to migrants themselves."

With the erection of border fencing and the consolidation of agents in urban centers, U.S. enforcement strategists deputized the landscape as their murderous ally. Agents kept their hands clean while heatstroke and dehydration did their dirty work. They washed from their hands the blood of the corpses they found in the deserts: "The Border Patrol had relocated the danger of immigration law enforcement to the natural landscape of the borderlands," Hernández notes. "Migrants battled deserts and rivers rather than men with guns."

U.S. agents didn't need to give an account for the deaths. No one had to claim responsibility. "When bodies shriveled in the desert or washed up on the banks of the Rio Grande, no one could be named in the death of the migrants," Hernández writes. "Fingerprints could not be dusted from the sand, and the rapids left no tracks to be followed." They converted the stark beauty of sand and rivers and mountains into "a system of violence without perpetrators"—anonymous killers, murderers shielding themselves from liability behind reams of internal memos. "As a county coroner declared over the dead bodies of five migrants who had attempted to cross through the Imperial Valley desert, 'No marks of violence were found [on] any of the five bodies.'"

The death toll has mounted over the decades, and U.S. officials defended the strategy. As Doris Meissner, the former commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, remarked in 2000, "We did believe geography would be an ally." She meant *accomplice*—nature as an accessory to crimes against migrants.

Earth speaks

At the cemetery, I add my body to a huddle of pastors and humanitarian workers gathered for a prayer service. We stand in a circle among the graves and join our voices in a petition for God to comfort all who yearn for the return of their lost ones. "We light this candle as a sign," we say in unison as the votive passes from hand to hand, "that we hold in our memory the lives of our sisters and brothers who have died in the desert." With the candle now placed in the center, flickering on the sand, we sing our hope:

Peace is flowing like a river,
flowing out of you and me,
flowing out into the desert,
setting all the captives free.

The lyrics focus my gaze on the wall beyond the cemetery, the barricade at the border, and I beg the sky for monsoon storms to rend the heavens with apocalyptic rains—a primordial deluge, flash floods gushing through arroyos, pounding against the metal barrier, bending steel and devouring concrete with a fierce torrent of destruction.

In 2011, Brady McCombs of the *Arizona Daily Star*

reported that a "40-foot stretch of mesh border fence east of Lukeville in Southwestern Arizona was knocked over Sunday by rainwater rushing through a wash." The water cleansed the landscape. The environment ravaged the blockages at the border. The earth reminded the government of ancient passageways. Nature flows against the violence built into the wilderness. I sing my prayer for *peace flowing like a river*—but peace as a cataclysmic flood, a disaster for U.S. Border Patrol's brutal regime, *setting all the migrants free.*

A summons

After offering prayers in the cemetery, our group joins the weekly vigil at the port of entry, the main border crossing where local residents remember the bodies in the desert, the lives killed by the weaponized environment. As we march along the road leading from the Mexican border into the U.S., we line the sidewalk with crosses—each cross with the name of a person found in Cochise County, Ariz.

I carry several in my hands and memorize them before I place the crosses on the street, leaning each one upright against the curb: Juan Tovar Hernández, Rosalía Ana Lilia Ramos Reyes, Isaias Sanchez Mayo, Lucina López de Olmos. The others have a phrase instead of a name: "No identificado," "No identificada." We take turns calling out the words on the crosses. After one person shouts a name, the rest of us respond by crying out, *"¡Presente!"*—declaring that we will not forget them, that we will remind the world of their deaths.

When the person beside me calls out a name, "Araceli Estrada Lopez y niño," my mind invents the scene in the desert. A flash of horror trembles my body as I imagine a mother and her child, their remains in decomposition. *"Presente,"* I waver, my eyes swimming in tears as the cross is laid on the ground.

Our memorial vigil concludes near the border wall, all of us in a circle, each hand holding another. A pastor from the local community steps into the center and shouts into the night, *"¡Jesucristo, presente!"* He shouts it four times, facing east, then north, then west, then south, a summons for the divine redemption of a god-forsaken land. ■

Isaac S. Villegas *is the pastor of Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship and the president-elect of the North Carolina Council of Churches. He was born and raised in the U.S. borderlands as a child of Latin American parents.*

Getty Images

Hostile Environment

In the journey from Central and South America and Mexico into the U.S., thousands of migrants have died from causes ranging from dehydration to drowning. Here's how the numbers add up.

4 days • The shortest time it takes migrants to cross the Arivaca corridor, an 800-square-mile desert area in Arizona near the border. For some migrants, the trek takes a week to nearly a month.

93 degrees • The average high temperature near the Arivaca corridor during the summer months. Temperatures top 100 degrees on 19 percent of summer days.

3,586 gallons • The amount of water vandalized by the U.S. Border Patrol in the Arivaca corridor from 2012 to 2015.

2 gallons • The maximum amount of water most migrants can carry. Medical professionals recommend people drink 1.3 to 3.1 gallons of water a day, depending on the conditions.

7,505 • The official number of deaths of assumed migrants on the southwest border reported by U.S. Border Patrol between fiscal years 1998 and 2018. (Some Border Patrol annual estimates undercounted deaths by as much as 43 percent.)

40 • The approximate percentage of bodies found in the desert that cannot be identified.

123 • The number of women and children who have died on their journey to the U.S.-Mexico border since 2014.

—Compiled by Will Young

Sources: Coalición de Derechos Humanos, No More Deaths, U.S. Border Patrol, International Organization for Migration

Markets and MORALITY

How do we measure a person's worth? Capitalism looks at the bottom line; Jesus offered a different yardstick.

by **KERI DAY**

WE LIVE IN AN AGE of "market morality": In our market system, we believe that money grants value and meaning to the moral and social questions of life. It doesn't. Nevertheless, we're under its spell.

Market morality interprets life in economic terms. For instance, many corporations do not believe they have a moral duty to vulnerable communities affected by their business practices. Instead, they assert that their primary duty is their fiduciary responsibility to shareholders and other stakeholders in the company. In this case, the moral domain of corporate practice is about securing profit returns to the exclusion of broader social and communal practices of care.

We have witnessed, repeatedly, poor communities and their environments polluted by toxins associated with corporate practices. This is readily seen in the Flint, Mich. water crisis, which persists. These companies offer no apologies, because their moral obligations are defined in economic terms, shaped by the bottom line of profit.

Market morality and its logic of profit disfigure how we understand and evaluate the moral content of social problems. For example, certain arguments for immigration employ a kind of market morality. The 2018 PRRI study "Do Americans Think Too Many Immigrants Are Coming to the U.S.? It Depends on Their Country of Origin" showed that Christian and European immigrants are embraced more

Images: Shutterstock/Clean Clothes Campaign

Garment workers in Bangladesh

We must have a vision of human life that's not controlled by the unholy whims of profit worship.

than Muslim and Mexican immigrants, due to assumptions that Europeans are more hardworking and industrious (and less criminal). This argument reduces immigrants to having worth and dignity insofar as they generate economic value.

But what about immigrants crossing the border who may have nothing to add to the economy? Must their human dignity and worth be measured solely in economic terms? Norms of market morality such as individual achievement and the quid pro quo do not allow for these deeper questions on the kinds of values we need, values that cannot be reduced to economic utilitarianism.

OBJECTS OF THE STATE

Market morality also conceals deeper Machiavellian processes at work that disenfranchise and devastate vulnerable communities. For instance, international trade agreements are often seen as positive contributions to the United States and other nations because they can generate greater wealth. However, this wealth is often concentrated in the hands of an elite few. These trade agreements often exacerbate dislocation, poverty, and despair.

Consider the 1996 NAFTA pact. There has been little discussion on how NAFTA allowed corporations to bring Mexican workers to America to "cheapen" the labor pool. Even more deceptive, few talk about the number one cause of job erosion and impoverishment of small farmers in Mexico, which led many of them to the U.S. in the first place: NAFTA itself, which opened the door for U.S. and transnational corporations to take over almost all Mexican corn production. Small farmers could not compete with these corporations and thus met economic devastation and dislocation.

Market morality praises international trade agreements and the enormous wealth these treaties create. It hides how such agreements are profoundly immoral, undermining entire Indigenous economies and ways of life for the sake of profit.

Immigration is not the only issue that is reduced to its economic utility. Policies surrounding mass incarceration tend to operate on a market calculus. President Trump recently signed into law a criminal justice reform bill that reduces the number of people in our nation's prisons by decreasing sentences. Yet this "sweeping reform" does not address the ongoing logic of the prison industrial complex, which conceptualizes prisoners in market terms. Prisoners are often treated as if they were objects of the state rather than human beings deserving of basic dignity and respect. U.S. prisons are extremely profitable because they use inmates as free or cheap labor. This hypercapitalist treatment of prisoners undermines the goal of rehabilitating and integrating them back into society.

When we are unable to see the humanity in certain populations, it legitimates a variety of exploitative practices. The prison industry is based on crude pursuit of profit and a devaluation of the basic humanity of prisoners, an obvious violation of Christian principles.

SWEATSHOP MORALITY

Market morality is operative around the globe. For example, economists such as Benjamin Powell have defended the economic utility of sweatshops on what they consider "moral" grounds. They argue that sweatshops offer higher wages and a higher standard of living than other options available to global workers within their own domestic contexts.

Even liberal journalists such as Paul Krugman and Nicholas Kristof reject the idea that sweatshops are always and intrinsically ethically wrong. They assert that sweatshops generate positive effects in extremely poor contexts around the globe, lifting millions of workers from abject poverty to something still awful but qualitatively better. They are clear that they are not for sweatshops that simply exploit workers, but instead support factories that adhere to basic human rights and provide options for workers who can choose to work for $23 a month in a sweatshop rather than work for $8 a month or less in their informal domestic sector. Even a sweatshop job, they argue, is better than scavenging for survival on a garbage dump.

Others turn to a market morality in their defense of sweatshops—the moral domain, for them, is reduced to a kind of consequentialism: An action, even activism, is ethical insofar as it enables profit for corporations. In this view, the profitability of corporations provides the conditions under which poor workers can be treated with dignity. However, even when sweatshops provide fairly safe working conditions, they often do not take seriously other forms of oppression, such as sexual harassment that women endure on the job and the refusal to help workers with health care and child care expenses. What is considered moral in relation to sweatshop economics is measured by how profitable a company can be.

Using economics as the litmus test for human value is deeply problematic and undermines core Christian commitments that human beings have intrinsic value that can never be reduced to how one participates in society or economy. How can we move away from the commodification of human beings in which human worth is defined by economic terms?

I think often about my childhood Pentecostal tradition and what it taught me about my own human worth and dignity. In my black church, many members experienced forms of economic deprivation, often not having adequate shelter, food, or clothing. The church also had members who were in better financial states.

What I remember clearly is how the entire congregation forged community. We valued communal norms of equality and interdependence. We visited each other's homes, laughing and growing together and learning and loving each other with each passing year. It didn't matter who had

Michael Wolf

Workers at a toy factory in China display their products.

what. We did not measure each other by attainments or achievements. We realized that God existed in the faces and hearts of each person. That was enough.

We possessed a theological worldview that measured human worth through the lens of love. We were worthy and endowed with human dignity because we were created in the image of the Creator. Yet, we knew that view could only breathe and live through our actions, through how we embodied togetherness in community. Hurt people often came to the doors of our church looking for care and compassion. We did not judge them based on what they could immediately contribute to the community or their economic value to broader society. Instead, we embraced their worth and dignity as a human being who deserves the love and care of Christ.

My church taught me a lot about the value of human life and exploded the norms of market morality. We must have a vision of human life that's not controlled by the unholy whims of profit worship.

HUMAN FLOURISHING

What word of hope should we offer the immigrant mother at the border who has lost a child? What message of life should we extend to prisoners who desire second chances as they serve out their time in prisons? How should they be treated in these institutions: as commodified labor, or as humans in need of opportunities to rehabilitate and reintegrate? How should we respond to poor workers who are often treated as mere cogs in multinational machines of unending profit? I believe that the life, message, and ministry of Jesus rejects market morality.

As Christians, we should also embrace human-centered approaches to our market activities. On a micro level, we might re-envision the importance of markets to people's lives, particularly those who are vulnerable. Markets do not have to be antithetical to our deeper values; we can make markets serve human flourishing.

For example, how can our consumer activities support businesses oriented toward rehabilitating ex-offenders? There are programs such as the Texas Offenders Re-entry Initiative that financially empower ex-offenders to help them reintegrate into society. Organizations such as Thistle Farms support women survivors of trafficking, prostitution, and addiction by making it possible for the public to purchase products handmade by the women. How might our churches fashion programs that respond to the widespread poverty that often afflicts the places where we live?

We might also work to address massive student debt, in which Wall Street profits from people seeking the "American Dream." Students are vulnerable in a market morality context that treats them as if they're merely part of the bottom line instead of as human beings.

We can also think on macro levels about markets. Working for public policy such as living wages and adequate health care reflects our commitment to prioritizing humans over profit, even within our market context.

This nation must rethink its basic moral terms when it comes to who we are as humans. We have been seduced by the market and its insidious moral utilitarianism. Christian communities have an opportunity to intervene and demonstrate that every human life has worth and dignity, because each life reflects the image of a loving, compassionate, and just God. As Jesus reminds his disciples in Matthew 6:24: "You cannot serve God and Mammon." ■

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Getty Images

By David P. Gushee

Reading the Classics May Save Your **Soul**

African-American fiction reveals the character of white Christian racism.

TO UNDERSTAND THE TRUMP PHENOMENON, which is at least in large part about race, I decided to read. Instead of reading more white people wrestling with what has gone wrong with white people, I, a white man, focused on African-American sources, mainly novels.

This move was first suggested to me by womanist ethicist Katie Cannon, who read the novelist Zora Neale Hurston as a primary source. I, too, began with Hurston, and then couldn't stop. For two years, I have been reading classic novels by African-American authors, seeking an answer to these questions: How do black characters experience white people? How do they describe white Christian people's morality and religion? The answers are clear—and devastating.

Three primary themes emerge: *moral debasement, religious powerlessness,* and *perceptual blindness.* Let me say a few words about each, with examples.

Moral debasement

These stories clearly reveal the moral damage white racism does to white racists. Attempting to distill specific elements, I see greed, pride, slander, arbitrary use of power, unchecked anger and violence, and alienation from human relationship.

Greed. These stories understand that white racism is deeply connected to greed. White people act based on our economic self-interest. We created this entire racist system to benefit

AMERICAN CLASSICS

Go Tell It on the Mountain by James Baldwin

Kindred by Octavia E. Butler

Not Without Laughter by Langston Hughes

The Ways of White Folks by Langston Hughes

Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston

Beloved by Toni Morrison

The Color Purple by Alice Walker

The Wedding by Dorothy West

Native Son by Richard Wright

Toni Morrison

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Avery Davis Lamb reviews *The End of Animal Farming*

ourselves, and this is pivotal to understanding white racism in all periods of American history. For example, in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple,* a character explains, "I know how they is. The key to all of 'em is money. The trouble with our people is as soon as they got out of slavery they didn't want to give the white man nothing else. But the fact is, you got to give 'em something. Either your money, your land, your woman, or your ass."

Or as Richard Wright put it in *Native Son,* "We live here and they live there. We black and they white. They got things and we ain't. They do things and we can't."

Pride. Racism is in large part about pride, an assumption of superiority. In these stories, white people assume that we are superior to black people in all meaningful ways. The stories offer glimpses of that prideful sense of superiority, and of those wounded by it.

"Ain't no way to read the bible and not think God white, she say," Walker writes in *The Color Purple.* "Then she sigh. When I found out I thought God was white, and a man, I lost interest. You mad cause he don't seem to listen to your prayers. Humph! Do the mayor listen to anything colored say? ... I know white people never listen to colored, period. If they do, they only listen long enough to be able to tell you what to do."

Slander. White people routinely slander the character of black people. We create—

White people create a degraded moral image of black people and act accordingly.

and continually re-create—a degraded moral image of black people and act accordingly. White people "go out of their way sometimes to say bad things about colored folks, putting it out that all of us are thieves and liars, or else diseased," Langston Hughes wrote in *The Ways of White Folks.* "No wonder it's hard for a black man to get a good job with that kind of false propaganda going around."

Arbitrary use of power. The stories suggest that white people are capricious and unpredictable in how we use our power over black people. No force can constrain us, while state power supports us. Such absolute, or near absolute, power is always morally corrupting. Octavia E. Butler, in her novel *Kindred*, wrote, "His father [the slavemaster] wasn't the monster he could have been with the power he held over his slaves. He wasn't a monster at all. Just an ordinary man who sometimes did the monstrous things his society said were legal and proper."

Unchecked anger and violence. White people created a slave system of unspeakable violence and settled into the practice of anger and violence against black people, even long after slavery ended. Often seeming to be on a hair-trigger, in local situations white people routinely resort to violence.

In a painful summary in *Beloved*, Toni Morrison wrote, "Eighteen seventy-four and whitefolks were still on the loose. Whole towns wiped clean of Negroes; eighty-seven lynchings in one year alone in Kentucky;

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New & Noteworthy

Solange

Inextinguishable Spirit
"Black faith still can't be washed away" Solange sings in her album *When I Get Home.* The ambient work pays homage to her Houston roots while exploring themes of blackness and spirituality. Synth, syncopated drums, smooth vocals, and experimental time signatures form a liberating fusion of sound. Saint Records/Columbia

Still Living by Faith
On June 17, 2015, nine worshippers at Emanuel AME Church greeted a visitor filled with hate. Produced by Viola Davis and Stephen Curry—and only in theaters on June 17 and 19—the documentary *Emanuel* interviews survivors of the massacre and families about their pain and healing. Fathom Events

God's Field
Ecology and theology meet in *Field with a View: Science and Faith in a Time of Climate Change,* by Katharine M. Preston. With a degree in anthropology and master's in forest science and divinity, Preston explores our place in this changing ecosystem and our responsibility to it. Iona Books

Holistic Solutions
Danielle Sered confronts incarceration as an ineffective response to violent crime in *Until We Reckon: Violence, Mass Incarceration, and a Road to Repair.* The founder of an award-winning restorative justice program, Sered offers radical solutions that account for both perpetrators and survivors of violence. The New Press

BY DANNY DUNCAN COLLUM

World Wide Death

THIS YEAR MARKS the 50th anniversary of the invention of the internet. One day in October 1969, scientists successfully transmitted data from a campus computer at UCLA to a computer at Stanford. Twenty years later, the infrastructure for the World Wide Web went into operation, and the creation of our whole digital universe quickly followed.

Lately, there have been plenty of days that have convinced me that the invention of the internet is one of the worst things that has happened since our first human parents decided that a little bit of "knowledge of good and evil" couldn't possibly hurt anything.

Today, with the withering of newspapers and brick-and-mortar retail, all but the most determined Luddites among us are forced to find our information and do much of our shopping in a corporate-controlled web environment that monitors and records our every whim or idle curiosity and turns it against us with barrages of targeted advertising. Most people do much of their socializing and information searches through social media platforms that thrive on ill-informed conflict and hyperbolic outrage.

Vladgrin

Social media has become a predatory business model to enrich the very few, very wealthy investors.

I've known all that for a while, and you probably have, too. But we mostly shrug and live with it. Then one day in March, a man in New Zealand shot and killed 50 innocent people at prayer and streamed a video feed of the carnage worldwide on Facebook Live.

That's enough.

In the past 30 years, we've allowed the Big Tech corporations to create a world in which anyone can transmit anything to everybody without ever stopping to think about it. People have streamed suicides, rapes, and murder-suicides. A couple of years ago, fake news transmitted through Facebook helped the Myanmar military provoke the ethnic cleansing of Rohingya Muslims. And recently came the Christchurch massacre.

Maybe social media's utopian vision of universal "connectedness" started out as fuzzy libertarian optimism about human nature among a few Bay Area geeks and hipsters. But it has become nothing more than a predatory business model to enrich the very few, very wealthy investors. Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr used to say that "the doctrine of original sin is the only empirically verifiable doctrine of the Christian faith." The social media world has given us plenty of proof of that.

In the past 25 years, Google, Facebook, and Amazon—to name the worst offenders—have become monopolistic public utilities. Like electric, water, and garbage collection companies, they dominate necessary functions of daily life. Those old analog utilities are usually either owned by governmental entities or very tightly regulated by some state commission that sets prices and terms of service. The same should be true of the new digital monopolies. They could be nationalized: It's not as crazy as it sounds.

But, failing that, they have to come under a regulatory regime that would have the authority to, for starters, do things like ban the sale of personal data and shut down Facebook Live as a public health hazard. But only the U.S. federal government can effectively do that. So, if we want to protect life and promote the common good in cyberspace, we've got to send leaders to Washington who will put the public interest ahead of anyone's private profit. ■

Danny Duncan Collum *teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. He is the author of the novel* White Boy.

Continued from Page 35

four colored schools burned to the ground; grown men whipped like children; children whipped like adults; black women raped ...; property taken, necks broken."

And James Baldwin, in a searing passage from *Go Tell It on the Mountain,* wrote, "There seemed no door, anywhere, behind which blood did not call out, unceasingly, for blood; no woman ... who had not seen her father, her brother, her lover, or her son cut down without mercy ... no man, preaching, or cursing ... who had not been made to bend his head and drink white men's muddy water; no man whose manhood had not been, at the root, sickened."

Alienation. The stories depict times when white people seek normal, healthy human relationships with black people, or seem to seek it. But we can't quite get there because we cannot release our desire for superiority.

Meanwhile, black people have no particular reason to trust white people, and thus real human communion is tragically out of reach.

"Rufus [the slave master] had done exactly what I had said he would do: Gotten possession of the [slave] woman without having to bother with her husband [whom he had killed]," observes a character in *Kindred*. "Now, somehow, Alice would have to accept not only the loss of her husband, but her own enslavement. Rufus had caused her trouble, and now he had been rewarded for it. It made no sense. No matter how kindly he treated her now that he had destroyed her, it made no sense."

White religion as powerless

In these stories, white people's religion is always supposedly Christianity. But insightful characters wonder over this religion, which they see is powerless to correct white people's racist behavior. Its main power is the ability to underwrite white hegemony with an all-powerful white God. It also has the power to distract and anesthetize the white Christian conscience. Like all the idols described in the Bible, white religion is most powerful in its ability to lead people away from the true God.

"Show me one white man who can look at a colored man without saying to himself, I see a colored man," Dorothy West wrote in *The Wedding.* "The only one I know of died

BY GARETH HIGGINS

From *Cloud Atlas*

A DECADE OF **CHANGE**

WHEN I STARTED writing this column a decade ago, the Oscars were about to address *The Dark Knight* not being nominated for Best Picture by expanding from five to 10 possible nominees. Only two Marvel Universe movies had been released, iPads didn't exist, movies were still mostly shot on film, and #MeToo wasn't known outside activist circles.

Today, as I write my final regular column for the magazine, the expanded nominations system has delivered one of the least plausible Best Picture awards in memory (*Green Book*), 22 Marvel movies have been released, people *make* films on iPads, watching cinema on a phone is second nature, and a new era of respect and accountability is dawning in the entertainment industry and elsewhere.

The last decade has seen women's cinematic voices asserted like never before. Sarah Polley's generous *Stories We Tell* and Agnès Varda's humane *Faces, Places* are two of the best films stimulating another surging movement: the widespread reflection on our own personal narratives.

The stories, voices, and faces of people of color are no longer the exception in mainstream movies—from *Queen of Katwe* to *Black Panther, Selma* to *12 Years a Slave, Blindspotting* to *Roma.*

LGBTQ stories are not relegated to tragedies: *Love is Strange* and *Moonlight* showed extraordinary loves in an ordinary world, redefining masculine stereotypes. On a larger scale, *Cloud Atlas*, perhaps the most underrated film of the decade, gave us a massive science fiction-mystical future vision that isn't just trans-inclusive but actually *depends* on humans being able to transcend binaries of many kinds—especially those to do with belonging.

And most important, the ultimate binary of erasing "enemies" by killing them has been challenged. Even though the Marvel movies are often overdone, at times they allow room for something less than total destruction of the bad guys.

And *Inside Out* was daring enough to risk making a children's film with no antagonist at all.

Along with the films named above, my favorites include *Wonderstruck, Endless Poetry, Toni Erdmann, Silence, Arrival, A Separation, The Assassin, Embrace of the Serpent, Interstellar, The Great Beauty, Shaun the Sheep, Paterson, Holy Motors,* and *The Tree of Life.* At its best, it was a decade of transition, moving previously marginalized characters into the center, offering alternatives to lethal violence, and placing story itself at the heart of how we think about ourselves. It's been great to share it with you here. See you at the movies. ■

***Gareth Higgins** (garethhiggins.net) is an Irish writer and founder of moviesandmeaning.com and irelandretreats.com.*

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on the cross, and the other one has not yet been born ... Keeping us colored is one of their chief occupations. If they don't remember it every minute, they're afraid they'll forget we're not children of God."

A privileged fog

Black characters in these stories clearly see white racism for what it is, decry its injustice, and try to resist it. But white people choose not to see the evil we are enforcing and the suffering we are inflicting. We live in a privileged fog.

"She knew that the big house, the house of pride where the white folks lived, would come down: it was written in the Word of God," Baldwin wrote in *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. "They, who walked so proudly now, had not fashioned for themselves or their children so sure a foundation as was hers. They walked on the edge of a steep

Human communion is out of reach: Black people have no particular reason to trust white people.

place *and their eyes were sightless*—God would cause them to rush down, as the herd of swine" (emphasis added).

THESE STORIES SLAP us in the face. Moral debasement. Religious powerlessness. Perceptual blindness. It all rings true, especially right now.

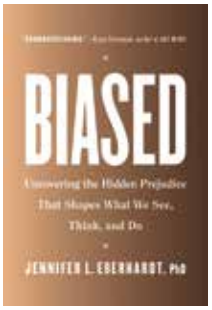
These American tales describe a systematically criminal and abusive racist enterprise under the color of law, justified by an absurd ideology of white moral superiority. A system that inflicted and still inflicts massive oppression on black people, and in which white power over black bodies morally ruins us while harming them. A people, supposedly Christian, whose religion does not constrain evildoing but instead underwrites it, and who manage a remarkable ability not to see what the hell we are doing and what we have become. ■

David P. Gushee, *a* Sojourners *contributing editor, is Distinguished University Professor of Christian Ethics at Mercer University.*

Reviewed by Whitney Parnell

IDENTIFY, EXAMINE, **RECTIFY**

Biased: Uncovering the Hidden Prejudice That Shapes What We See, Think, and Do, **by Jennifer L. Eberhardt. Viking.**



***BIASED* IS FOR** every person who claims to not see color. As someone who navigates that phrase regularly in my professional anti-racism work, I was thrilled to read a book that swiftly debunks that statement—with data to back it.

Jennifer Eberhardt thoroughly outlines how racial bias is unavoidable in a society that historically institutionalized white supremacy, and she incorporates case studies, personal experiences, surveys, scientific research, and numerical data to prove it. She walks us through examples of various settings and institutions where this bias presents itself: policing, incarceration, socioeconomic status, schooling, housing, employment, customer service, personal interactions. All confirming that racial bias is, in fact, everywhere.

The book's purpose is not to guilt-trip or shame readers. Eberhardt notes several times her keen awareness that defensiveness is often a byproduct of discussing race, and I am well acquainted with this fragility. However, if readers are willing to approach this book with an open mind, then I hope they will see that Eberhardt simply presents us with unequivocal truth so that we may proceed as conscious individuals who can proactively address our own biases and hold society accountable for doing the same.

This book affirms important truths that are necessary to dismantle systemic racism: 1) As human beings, we are conditioned to have bias—it is a natural psychological process to which no one is immune. 2) Therefore, all of us do, in fact, see color. 3) Racial bias harms people of color. Conclusively, not only do we all inevitably see color, but we *must* see color to identify, examine, and rectify racism.

Biased is a gem, and it is clear how much knowledge and research Eberhardt skillfully wove into this informative but digestible piece. It is loaded with information, yet it never reads as dense. Its saturation of facts, studies, and examples informs readers. And its balance between personal narratives and quantitative facts makes it fit to be both a textbook for a university course and a new read for a book club group. Readers who are completely new to discussing race, experts in the field, and everyone in between can complete this book with a wealth of new knowledge, language, and personal reflection. That cannot be said about every book.

Biased comes right on time, as we navigate a period where discussions about race are critical yet still feared by many. Not only did I complete this read feeling more informed about the topic, but now when I inevitably encounter the "I don't see color" comment, I can refer the person to *Biased* and spare my emotional labor for that moment. For that alone, I am grateful. ■

***Whitney Parnell** is a black millennial activist, singer, and co-founder and CEO of Service Never Sleeps.*

Reviewed by Avery Davis Lamb

OUR ETHICAL **STRUCTURE**

***The End of Animal Farming: How Scientists, Entrepreneurs, and Activists Are Building an Animal-Free Food System,* by Jacy Reese. Beacon Press.**

IN HIS ESSAY "The Land Ethic," environmentalist Aldo Leopold tells a story from *The Odyssey* in which Odysseus, upon returning to Troy, hangs a dozen slave girls for misbehaving in his absence. The act, Leopold writes, was not one of ethics but of property: "The ethical structure of that day ... had not yet been extended to human chattels." Leopold uses this as an example of how our ethical structure has expanded over history. This expansion of the moral circle is a common thread in history, encompassing, slowly, people and things that were once outside moral consideration.

Jacy Reese tugs on this thread in his

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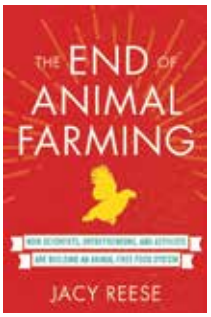


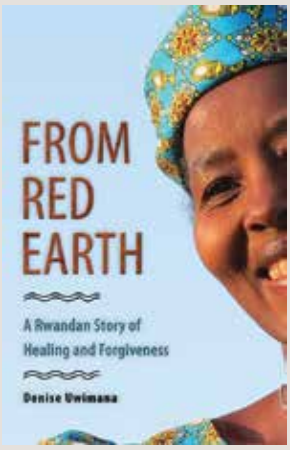
first book, *The End of Animal Farming,* pulling it until all sentient animals are within our realm of morality. Reese writes with a voice that trades the prophetic for the practical, laying out a road map on how we might get to an end of animal farming without spending the requisite amount of time to share why we need to get there.

Though not written from a religious perspective, the book does read with moral clarity, bookended with chapters on the expanding moral circle, anecdotes of iconic people of faith who resisted animal injustice, and a laser focus on the importance of each individual animal as a sentient being that deserves to be loved and valued. Despite Reese's tendency to

EXCERPT

A SPRING OF **LIFE**

"WORKING SHOULDER to shoulder, after sharing our struggles and tears, is forging a powerful bond," said the woman laboring at my side. "Death once swept our land, but life has its own momentum." When the fieldwork was done, we built a stable for Theresie, who had shared her hut with a cow. The young people helped, hauling poles and erecting the walls and roof.



"We're building more than a shed—we're building a living church," Theresie exulted. "Whoever has food or money, health or vigor, shares with those who have none—just like the first believers in Jerusalem. Who cares if we are not highly organized—we are sisters!"

At least 95 Rwandan pastors died protecting their congregations during the genocide. Their witness and sacrifice stand forever. The majority of pastors, however, ignored, supported, or even joined the killing. So institutional Christianity had lost its credibility in our country. But we now discovered that Jesus does not need steepled buildings or religious trappings. He visits and unites humble, broken people.

Before Karin and I left Mukoma at the end of those nine days, the village gathered once more at my mother-in-law's compound. Consoletia chose this moment to publicly dedicate her property to the work of healing.

"Is it possible?" a woman's voice cried out. "Here at Consoletia's compound, where 44 Tutsi were killed, God is opening a spring of life."

Jubilation erupted, but my mother-in-law raised her hand for silence. To my amazement, I heard her declare, "I want those who killed, also, to become human again. In this place, they, too, will learn to love." ■

From From Red Earth: A Rwandan Story of Healing and Forgiveness, *by Denise Uwimana, published by Plough Publishing House (April 2019). Reproduced by permission.*

devolve into tedium and occasional argumentative errors, the book is a challenging manifesto for anyone looking to examine their relationship with the animals they consume.

Reese's book stands out among stacks of recent books on animal agriculture because, rather than focusing on the ecosystem or ecological impacts of animal farming, he writes with a singular ethical vision on the dignity of the animal as an individual. Animal farming must end, he argues, because it is an affront to the value of each sentient being that is butchered for our consumption. This is a perspective that feels religious in approach: Each individual animal has inherent worth aside from its functional values.

Unfortunately, Reese commits the same fundamental error in his writing that many industrial farming operations commit: diminishing eating from a spiritual act to a transactional act. While his approach to animal welfare is clearly individual-focused, he takes a utilitarian approach to the act of eating, leaving little room for spiritual nuance or celebration of humane animal farming. He writes that "the exploitation of any sentient being—using them for one's own purposes in the way we use desks, shovels, and inanimate machines—is intrinsically wrong." This argument betrays a mechanistic approach to eating that sees food as merely a tool to power our bodies.

The End of Animal Farming places sentient animals within our realm of morality.

The End of Animal Farming is an interesting manual for someone moving toward an animal-free diet, but anyone looking for a deeper, more thoughtful (or even spiritual) consideration of our interaction with our farmed friends might look elsewhere. Seeking the end of animal farming is but one way, among many others, to address the tragedy of industrial animal agriculture. ■

***Avery Davis Lamb** is federal policy associate for Interfaith Power & Light.*

Poetry

BY RONNIE SIRMANS

Suzanne Tucker

The Church Is Not the Building

A white blossom, purpled
at the edges like penance,
lies under an unbloomed tree.
Maybe a bee got greedy, then
dropped the petals amid ascension,
demi-god wary of nectar's nature.
Then it's time for a world bared.
Fallen leaves prefer to congregate,
crowding curbs and gutters like
repentant sinners alongside a river.

***Ronnie Sirmans** (@RonSirmans) is an Atlanta newspaper journalist.*

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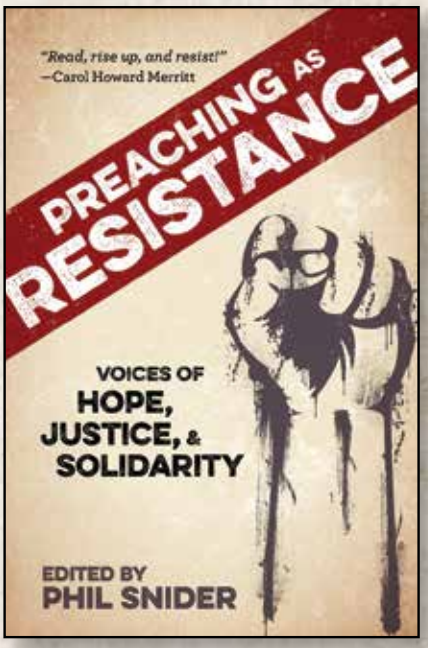

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BY ROSE MARIE BERGER

Spiritual Reflections on My Paycheck

MONEY IS TO Americans what sex was to Victorian England. We'll read about others' exploits, but rarely reveal our own.

In the mid-1980s, I joined the Sojourners base Christian community. I was in my 20s with little disposable cash and a modest college loan. My theological attitude was "love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Timothy 6:10)—even *thinking* about money risked sliding into America's amorous relationship with capital.

Christian community is an experiment in discipleship. The Sojourners community wanted to pattern our life on the early church. We owned houses and cars communally. Our salaries in the Sojourners ministries were based on need or paid directly to a common fund. In illness, we relied on "mutual aid" rather than health insurance. We constantly experimented.

Our economic model taught me to understand money communally and also allowed me to push my financial responsibility to others. I finally woke up when Bible scholar Ched Myers said to me, "*Not* thinking about money is a privilege most people in the world don't have." In large part, discretionary capital is an unearned entitlement given to some. Now I see how the early church took responsibility for communal needs by paying attention to economics, not by ignoring it.

"*Not* thinking about money is a privilege most people in the world don't have."

I'm in my mid-50s now. I still work at Sojourners. My annual compensation package, which includes health, life, and disability insurance—is about average for an editor in Washington, D.C. After accounting for retirement plan payments, state and federal withholding, and Medicare and Social Security contributions, my take-home pay is (full transparency) about $2,700 per month. For comparison, a one-bedroom apartment in my D.C. neighborhood rents for $2,300 per month, utilities not included.

I can afford housing because I co-own a house and share expenses with other adults. Purchasing our house was possible because we had access to Sojourners' housing cooperative and financing through government assistance and a nonprofit affordable-housing agency.

Shutterstock

I bank locally. When my local branch was gobbled up by Wells Fargo, I switched to a neighborhood credit union. My co-owner and I keep an emergency house repair fund with Self-Help, a national credit union "committed to community development in underserved urban areas." I have one credit card, also through a credit union—it's the card I got as an undergrad when I worked in the arboretum at UC Davis. I pay it off monthly.

I don't have a mobile phone, but my long-distance carrier, CREDO, donates 1 percent of my payment to socially progressive organizations.

Just Money Advisors helps me align my retirement funds with my values. I don't want to support gun manufacturers, fossil fuel companies, or the defense industry. I do want to support women-led small businesses, land trusts, and community-impact investing. JMA makes sure those funds circulate and work for others until I need them.

I give monthly to my church and to my family. I pay what community economics leader Chuck Matthei called my "social mortgage" (or reparations) to offset my unearned economic privilege. Recently, I've begun paying Native organizations an "entrance fee" when I enter their sovereign territory.

Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr encouraged "proportionate giving," instead of tithing. Elizabeth O'Connor expanded on this idea: "None of us has to be an accountant to know what 10 percent of a gross income is, but each of us has to be a person on her knees before God if we are to understand our commitment to proportionate giving. Proportionate to what? Proportionate to the accumulated wealth of one's family? Proportionate to one's income and the demands upon it? ... The answer, of course, is in proportion to all these things."

When you can, give to those who ask. Don't expect anything in return. Write a money autobiography. Keep money circulating, not accumulating. Invest in people, not things. If you have too much, give it away. If you have too little, invest what you have in others. Remember, wealth and assets, debts and wages are all topics for Christian discipleship. ■

Rose Marie Berger, *senior associate editor of* Sojourners *and author of* Bending the Arch: Poems *(2019), is a Catholic peace activist and poet.*

BY MARTIN L. SMITH

Precarious Gifts of the Spirit

PRAYER IS MOSTLY not a matter of getting what we lack; rather, as Thomas Merton taught at the very end of his life, it's a means to experience what we already possess.

None of the gifts of the Spirit—"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23)—are fixed endowments. These are precarious resources, in the strict sense of the word "precarious," which comes from the Latin *precare*, meaning "to pray." These gifts must be rediscovered, relived, and newly explored, as we will in this Pentecost season.

It isn't easy in threatening times to renew our gift of joy. Confronted by venality, xenophobia, denial, and ideological violence, we tense up and wear our grimness on our face as the badge of Christian moral seriousness. But without joy we are lost. Our scriptures teach us, when we take care to read between the lines, that the opposite of joy is not suffering but numbness. Joy is the partner, not the opponent, of a willingness to struggle, embrace pain, pay the costs of discipleship, and cross again to the dark side of the street where we meet those whom our society scapegoats and abandons. With the church in Rome, we shall hear again, "When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, sharing in Christ's suffering and sharing in Christ's glory" (Romans 8:15-17).

***Martin L. Smith,** an Episcopal priest, is an author, preacher, and retreat leader. He lives in Washington, D.C.*

The opposite of joy is numbness.

[JUNE 2]

"I Desire"

Acts 16:16-34; Psalm 97; Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21; John 17:20-26

LEADING UP TO Pentecost, our readings vibrate with desire. At the Last Supper Jesus offers up a longing that these gathered friends will experience union with the glorified Jesus as a shared experience that will truly bind them together. "The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one ... I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory" (John 17:22, 24).

John's gospel offers many of the New Testament's strongest challenges to those who are tempted to separate the mystical from the missional and make intimate experience with God an opposite pole to the outreaching impetus toward mission. The life of experienced oneness with God is in fact the secret of attracting those who have not yet experienced the life of God for themselves. As Jesus prays, "may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (17:21).

The final page of Revelation is scripture's last word on the meaning of all that has gone before. It offers to all whose desire has been aroused the consummation of their yearning in what John the Revelator has called "the marriage feast of the Lamb." "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' ... And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift" (22:17, 18).

[JUNE 9]

In Other Languages

Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; Romans 8:14-17; John 14:8-17, 25-27

THE WRITER OF Acts is looking back two generations when describing the outpouring of the Spirit on the feast of Pentecost. Probably the earliest traditions represented the event as a spectacular instance of glossolalia. We know from Paul's letters about this free-form ecstatic utterance and from modern Pentecostalism. It seems that this phenomenon had largely subsided by the time Acts was penned. The story is reshaped to prophesy the rippling out of Christian mission in ever widening circles. Fifty years after Christ's resurrection the good news is being proclaimed in numerous languages; worship is adapting to different cultures in distant regions.

The church summoned into life by the Spirit is not monolingual or monocultural, but intrinsically diverse. The Acts writer implies that this diversity is not just pragmatic, but rooted in the Spirit's advocacy for human differences, the Spirit's bestowal on every human their own flame, honoring and transfiguring their own cultural distinctiveness. The wonder of Pentecost!—"How is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?" (Acts 2:8).

Today our preaching on Pentecost would do well to urge the question: "What does it take to rid the church of the vestiges of cultural hegemony, the unearned privileges and dominance of certain cultures, especially those that had the upper hand in the colonial epoch? How do we measure true revival in the Spirit in terms of renewed honor due to other languages spoken by Christians and seekers of different, and hitherto largely marginalized, cultures?"

[JUNE 16]

Vigilant Openness

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31; Psalm 8; Romans 5:1-5; John 16:12-15

PAUL'S CLAIM, in our reading from the letter to the Romans, that "hope does not disappoint us" (5:5) is provocative. Dashed hopes, failed projects, disillusioning setbacks, unrealized dreams are woven into the very texture of our experience. But, more often than not, the "hope" that let us down was mere wishful thinking. Paul is speaking of a gift that can only emerge from suffering, suffering that trains us in endurance, endurance that strengthens our character. Hope does not disappoint: It is what births in us the resilience to rise again on the third day from every disappointment. In the reading from John's gospel, Jesus promises that the Spirit of truth will come to the disciples. The truth is not only what has been revealed and

must be appropriated time and again. The Spirit will "declare to you the things that are to come" (16:13) since changing times and unprecedented challenges will call for vigilant openness to the new things that God desires to accomplish with and through us. What is hope, if not this courageous openness to the constant innovation of the Holy One?

Our reading from the book of Proverbs personifies the wisdom of God as an alluring teacher, a master artist, a prophetic voice, whose guidance for living in harmony with God is rooted in the very fabric of the universe. Wisdom has been God's companion and co-worker from the very beginning of creation!

[JUNE 23]

Unlikely Hero

Isaiah 65:1-9; Psalm 22:19-28; Galatians 3:23-29; Luke 8:26-39

WE SHOULDN'T hesitate to call the lunatic whom Jesus cures on one of his expeditions into Gentile territory a kind of hero. Sometimes those who dramatically fall apart under the stress of intolerable social conditions *are* heroes. They take on the suffering of a whole people and their breakdown is a kind of terrible truth-telling. Don't we encounter "heroes" like this living homeless on our streets, mirroring back to us the craziness of our broken social order? Living under an army of occupation is no picnic, and this pitiful man who camps out naked in the town graveyard, repeatedly shackled by the authorities, dramatizes his own people's predicament. He even calls himself "Legion," in bitterly ironic reference to the Roman military garrison stationed nearby.

"Hope does not disappoint us."

Jesus' arrival signals the end of this awful victim identity as the gruesome mascot of a people under enemy occupation. The exorcism Jesus performs includes a frightful negotiation with the demons, permitting them to execute their cunning exit strategy—"piggybacking" in a herd of swine! The plan is futile: The demons dramatically self-destruct. Jesus calmly gets the man fitted out with borrowed clothes and sends him home. His family must come to know him in his simple humanity and goodness, now that Jesus has set him free from the misguided need to perform as the ghastly icon of their downtrodden community, and has relieved him of the burden of bearing alone their unacknowledged communal pain.

[JUNE 30]

Tough and Tender

1 Kings 19:15-16, 19-21; Psalm 16; Galatians 5:1, 13-25; Luke 9:51-62

CHE GUEVARA'S burning clarity about his own rejection of nonviolence led him to declare himself "the contrary of a Christ." But Che's revolutionary passion sometimes flashes a brighter light on the gospel than well-meaning liberals can usually generate. "It is necessary to grow tough, but never lose our tenderness," is a saying of his that has lodged in my heart since the '60s. This week confronts us with the paradox of life in the Spirit as both tough, combative, fierce, and suffused with tenderness. The "sons of thunder" want Jesus to call down fire and brimstone on Samaritans afraid to offer them hospitality. Jesus sternly rebukes that kind of hard vindictiveness. And yet right away he makes demands on a man who wants to follow him—just after he completes his father's funeral—which are scandalously tough: "Let the dead bury their own dead" (Luke 9:60).

Paul is equally insistent on living at the heart of the paradox of toughness and tenderness. He extols the fruits of the Spirit, "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). Yet, Paul is painfully direct about the need to root out from the heart all expressions of the "desires of the flesh," those competitive urges that pit people against each other, fueling exploitation, and enslaving them with addictions. All this must be crucified. Pity the preachers this week who are used to weaving a soothing message from the scriptures! ■

***"Preaching the Word,"** Sojourners' online resource for Bible study and sermon preparation, is available at sojo.net/ptw.*

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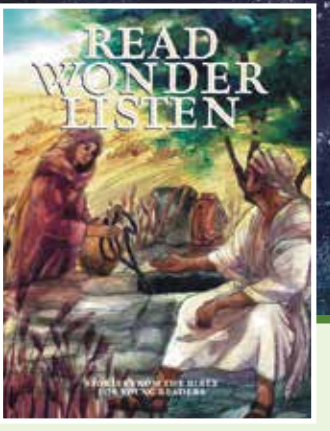

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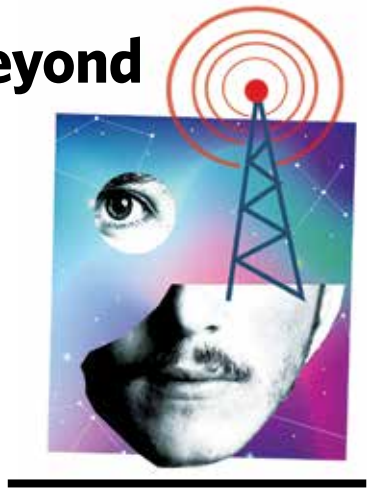

Ken Davis

THE UNIVERSE, as you may recall from a previous column, is an incalculably vast space that is constantly expanding. So it was surprising when scientists claimed that recently detected radio waves came from "halfway across the universe." Not to quibble, but if the universe is infinitely large and expanding, how did they figure the halfway point? Our annual family drive to Dallas feels endless, but Memphis is definitely halfway.

Setting aside distance—your mileage may vary—the more interesting concern is the signals themselves. They were described as "repeating" microbursts at an extremely low frequency. Kudos for getting the signals this far, but their crude simplicity suggests a certain lack of technological sophistication. No offense, but it's not what we expect from an advanced civilization. Our greatest source of scientific knowledge—the motion picture industry—has shown us repeatedly that any communication from outside our galaxy comes from superior life forms. When aliens talk to us, it's not in simple monotones, but in highly communicative ways, such as "Die, earthling," or "We've come to take [depending on which *Star Trek* movie] your water, your whales, or Princess Leia." (I know, that last one was from *Star Wars*, but after episode 19ish, one longs for the comforting mediocrity of William Shatner.)

Should an expanding universe just cut back on the carbs?

Interestingly, the structure of these radio waves is more reminiscent of our own Morse code, a 19th-century invention that has little modern application, except to humiliate Boy Scouts trying to advance to the next level. I never learned Morse code and to this day can only claim the status of Boy Scout Second Class, bringing both shame to my family and a mocking sneer from 12-year-olds. (In my defense, I knew intuitively that dots and dashes would be of no use on Twitter. And in a recent scientific poll, dots and dashes were voted "worst emojis ever.")

BUT THE FACT that an alien civilization may be using this same primitive technology leads me to an uncomfortable conclusion. It pains me to say it, but in this case ... *we* may be the superior beings.

Let that sink in.

After all, *ours* is the civilization that needs technological help (we can't yet travel to another planet, although if Elon Musk wants to go to Mars, I say let him). *Ours* is the planet that needs intervention to free us from violence, poverty, and Rush Limbaugh, whose daily microbursts have their own primitive and alien qualities. *Ours* is the world that suffers from multiple religions that all claim an exclusive relationship to God. Although, as Franklin Graham helpfully pointed out, there is only one true God and He's a guy, speaks English, and goes to a Baptist church on Sundays, at least until football season.

Sadly, about all we humans have to offer another civilization is our universal love of sandwiches, but what if the other planet is gluten-free? What then?

There has always been the hope that aliens from outer space might actually use their advanced technologies to contribute to the greater good of humankind, once they destroyed most of our cities, of course. One hopes they would eventually weary of enslaving our species and maybe give us tips on, say, increasing agricultural yield. Or improving water filtration. Or perhaps rebuilding the communication infrastructure they initially destroyed. (If only I'd been a better Boy Scout, I could be the Bill Gates of Morse code! *Darnit!*)

REGARDLESS, the mysteries of the cosmos continue to confound and inspire. The Big Bang has always been of particular interest to me, because of the contradictory convictions it engenders. Even though many Christians dismiss the theory as heretical against the Genesis account, it seems to me it's *exactly* what I was taught in Vacation Bible School. "Let there be light," God was overheard saying, and the Big Bang does not contradict that. The biblical narrative of the seven days of creation may play a little loose with the facts—turns out a "day" might be a tad longer than 24 hours; by 17 quintillion hours, give or take—but the instantaneousness of creation aligns closely with God kick-starting it. If not "let there be light," maybe something else. Maybe in Latin. Or maybe just a snap of the fingers. Or a "Think fast!" followed by a hearty "Made you look!" Either way it happened, and it's incredible.

And I'm pretty sure Franklin Graham would agree with me on that. ■

Ed Spivey Jr. *is art director of* Sojourners *magazine.*

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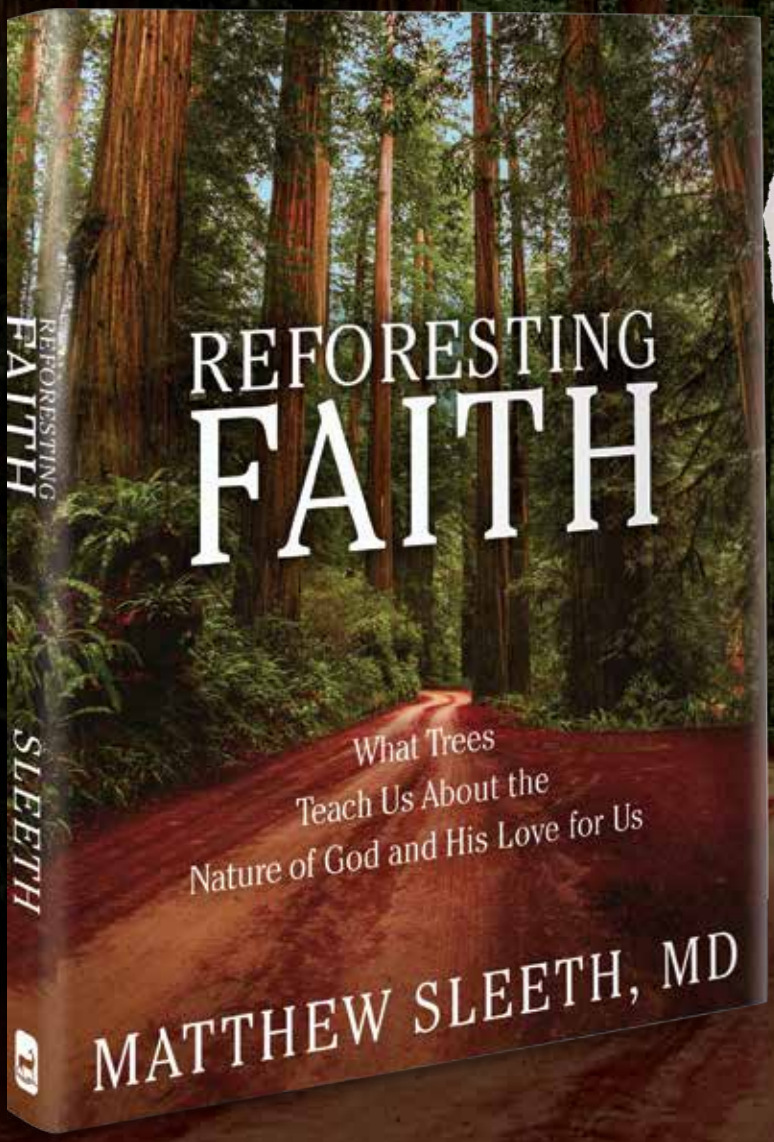

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